BUSY BODIES: WOMEN, POWER AND POLITICS AT THE COURT OF
ELIZABETH I, 1558-1603

by

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and approved by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Busy Bodies: Women, Power and Politics at the Court of Elizabeth I, 1558-1603

by CATHERINE LOUISE HOWEY

Dissertation Director:
Alastair Bellany

The purpose of this dissertation, *Busy Bodies: the Role of Women at the Court of Elizabeth I, 1558-1603*, is to build upon the small, but growing body of scholarship that examines how women exercised political agency at the court of Elizabeth I and how their courtly activities played a part in shaping the reign and Elizabeth’s iconography. The dissertation uses an interdisciplinary approach to a diverse range of sources such as dress, portraiture, government documents, tomb monuments and letters to explore the various ways Queen Elizabeth I and her court women, especially the women who worked in the queen’s privy chamber—the two to three small rooms the monarch used for private repose—mutually constructed each other’s power and identity. Until recently, scholars have argued that the Elizabethan privy chamber women were apolitical—an argument based largely upon unquestioned assumptions about gender. However, as this dissertation demonstrates gender did not preclude women from politics, but rather shaped the way women could gain and wield their power. Gender as a category of historical analysis can also expand the definition of “political” and identify new arenas where politics was practiced such as the exchange of news, information, and sartorial gifts.
The women who served the queen were important because they were in close physical proximity to the queen, and because the queen often appropriated their bodies, clothes, and service to construct or extend her own monarchical image and power. Since the queen allowed these women to act as queenly surrogates who extended her authority to places outside the palace, privy chamber women acquired higher status and more privileges than they otherwise would have held by birth or marriage. However, this special status and its privileges also created tension between the queen and her uniquely empowered female courtiers. While women were more often part of the processes that connected Elizabeth to larger circles of her subjects, they also had the potential to disrupt these relationships. Therefore, understanding how the queen interacted with other women is necessary if we are to understand Elizabeth’s reign as a whole.
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Adam Knobler, worked tirelessly as my advisor to help prepare me for graduate school. His partner, Alexandra Cuffell, also contributed to my academic upbringing. Daniel W. Crofts, Jo-Ann Gross, and Annie Niccolossi also provided me with a strong foundation upon which to build my academic career. Moreover, all of them have continued to support and encourage me long after I had graduated. I hope they realize, just as I do, that my dissertation is not just a product of my graduate training, but of my undergraduate work as well.

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<tr>
<td>Cecil MSS</td>
<td>Cecil MSS, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSPD</td>
<td>Calendar of state papers, domestic series, preserved in Her Majesty’s Public Record Office, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth, James I (eds. R. Lemon, M.A.E. Green, 12 vols., London, 1865-72)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSP Venetian</td>
<td>Calendar of state papers and muniments, relating to English affairs, existing in the archives and collections of Venice, and in other libraries of northern Italy (eds. R. Brown, G. Cavendish-Bentick, et al., 38 vols., London, 1864-1947)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELR</td>
<td>English Literary Renaissance</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMR</td>
<td>Franco Maria Ricci</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folger</td>
<td>Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, USA</td>
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<td>HMC</td>
<td>Historical Manuscript Commission</td>
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<td>HMC Hatfield</td>
<td>HMC., A calendar of the manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury, KG, &amp;c, preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire (24 vols., London, 1883-1976)</td>
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Introduction: Bodies in Motion

By May of 1559 Elizabeth I had been queen of England for only seven months, but she was already embroiled in one of the most important political issues that would dominate her reign until the early 1580s: who she would take as a husband. Elizabeth had assumed the English throne as a single woman, but no one expected her to remain so for very long. She was expected to marry in order to bear a legitimate heir to succeed her to the throne. Moreover, contemporaries believed that women were intellectually and morally inferior to men, and therefore, the country and the queen needed a king to firmly and successfully set foreign and domestic policy.¹ Early suitors for Elizabeth’s hand included two of the Holy Roman Emperor’s sons, the Austrian Hapsburg Archdukes Ferdinand and Charles.² A report dated May 1559 by Augustin Gyntzer, Secretary to the Hapsburg ambassador, recorded that he had immediately delivered the Emperor’s letter to the queen, but refrained from giving Elizabeth the portraits of the Archdukes which he had also brought.³ Instead, he “placed them so that they could not fail to catch the eyes of those noble ladies who are most in the Queen’s good graces, and that, you may be assured, is as if the Queen herself had seen them. More I need not say.”⁴ Although Gyntzer is vague about exactly where he placed the portraits, his report does reveal that

² Doran 21.
he not only needed to win the approval of the queen and her male government officials, but the approval of Elizabeth’s female courtiers.

These lines in Gyntzer’s report are striking because they speak to one of the most overlooked and misunderstood aspects of Elizabeth I’s reign: the role of women at the Elizabethan court. According to this dispatch, Gyntzer deliberately placed these portraits so that the “noble ladies” at court who held the queen’s favor would see them. Even more striking is the secretary’s claim that if these ladies saw these portraits, it was as if the queen had seen them with her own eyes. Nor did Gyntzer believe that the Emperor would read these lines with incredulous eyes, since Gyntzer ended with the matter-of-fact phrase, “More I need not say.” And yet for the twenty-first century reader much more does need to be said. Although scholars can only speculate, Gyntzer’s “noble ladies who are most in the Queen’s good graces,” were probably the ladies and gentlewomen who served in Elizabeth’s privy chamber—the two to three small rooms the queen used for private repose. The privy chamber women’s main duties were to provide the queen with servants to take care of her bodily needs and provide her with companions of appropriate social stature. Women maintained their position in the privy chamber only as long as they maintained the favor of the queen. In 1559, many of the women who served Elizabeth in this capacity were either relatives or women who had been in her household when she was a princess. Thus, these female attendants and companions, who were from the gentry and aristocratic families, easily fit the secretary’s description of noble ladies who stood in Elizabeth’s “good graces.”

Even though these women served Elizabeth in a very personal and intimate capacity, it is not clear what it was about their position that permitted the Hapsburg
secretary to believe that if these women saw the portraits, it was the same as though the queen herself had seen them. In this scenario these women are extensions of the queen; their eyes are the queen’s eyes. Gyntzer’s report reveals that the women at the court of Elizabeth were entities that were important enough to be included in his ambassadorial dispatches. In subsequent ambassadorial reports written by himself, his boss, Count Helffenstein and the Count’s replacement, Baron Caspar Breuner, they often mention Elizabeth’s court and privy chamber women. According to these reports, sometimes these women were part of the majestic background that emphasized the queen’s royalty, other times they were cultivated by the ambassadors as sources of information about Elizabeth’s feelings about various suitors and about her chastity. The women who served Elizabeth and provided her with companionship are clearly part of the political landscape recorded by the Hapsburg emissaries. But, what was the connection between serving the queen and being able to act as an extension of the queen herself? Unfortunately, what was so self-evident to the Hapsburg secretary has either been lost or misunderstood by present day historians.

Unlike sixteenth-century foreign ambassadors, historians have not paid close attention to Elizabethan female courtiers. Although the women of Queen Elizabeth I’s court have made small appearances in the form of amusing anecdotes in the histories about Elizabeth’s reign since the seventeenth-century, serious academic studies have only recently begun to focus upon women at the Tudor court.\(^5\) It has taken time to argue

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\(^5\) For seventeenth-century examples see, William Camden, *The True History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess, Elizabeth, Late Queen of England* (London, 1688; reprinted New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1970); *The Secret History of the Most Renowned Q. Elizabeth and the E. of Essex by a Person of Quality* Cologne, 1680); Francis Osborne, *Historical Memoires on the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I* (London, 1658); although the women of Queen Elizabeth’s court have been the subject of amateur histories written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they often contain more fiction than fact such as Violet A. Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth’s Maids of Honor and Ladies of the Privy Chamber* (New York: John
against pronouncements like Mortimer Levine’s statement that “the evidence would have it that what was true for queens consort surely held true for all women in Tudor England: they held no significant place in Tudor government.” Christopher Haigh has been equally dismissive of women’s political importance at Elizabeth’s court, stating “Soon after Elizabeth’s accession, she called together the women of the Chamber and ordered them ‘never to speak to her on business affairs.’ The Queen was to be the only petticoat politician.” There are a few reasons why the historiography on Elizabethan court politics has had a difficult time acknowledging that women too participated in early modern English politics. As Barbara Harris has demonstrated, women were effaced from the Tudor political scene, because politics, or “government” to use Levine’s term, has been traditionally understood to take place in formal, institutionalized decision making bodies such as Parliament or the Privy Council, which excluded women’s participation.

Although the formal exclusion of women from such political institutions has proved a truism not only in studying the Tudor court, but most early modern European courts,


there is one problem that is unique to the Elizabethan case.\textsuperscript{9} Much of Elizabethan political and cultural history is predicated upon Elizabeth’s exceptionality—her singularity. Whether or not Elizabeth is depicted as a strong ruler or a weak one in histories about her and her reign, she is still portrayed as the lone woman at court working entirely with (or around) her male officials and courtiers.

Since the late 1980s, however, there has been increasingly more attention paid to the women at Elizabeth’s court, especially the women who served in the privy chamber. The purpose of this dissertation, \textit{Busy Bodies: Women, Power, and Politics at the Court of Elizabeth I, 1558-1603}, is to build upon this small, but growing body of scholarship that examines how women were able to participate in Elizabethan politics and help shape the reign of the last Tudor monarch. I will explore the various ways Queen Elizabeth I and her female courtiers, especially the women of the privy chamber built politicized relationships with each other which affected the way Elizabeth could construct her public image and extend her monarchical authority. My work is part of the larger enterprise of feminist, cultural, and political historians to gain a better understanding of politics in a way that is both broader and more nuanced. It is only by acknowledging that politics in early modern England (and elsewhere) manifested itself in many forms, some formal and some informal, that scholars can begin to identify women as political agents at the early modern court.

Much of the past scholarship on the Elizabethan privy chamber has been built upon the work of the historian David Starkey, who examined the rise of the privy chamber under Henry VII and Henry VIII.\textsuperscript{10} Originally, the royal household was divided into two parts: the household and the chamber, but under Henry VII, a third department started to form, the privy chamber.\textsuperscript{11} Henry VII staffed his privy chamber with men of lowly social status whose only function was to take care of the king’s bodily needs, which denied the power-hungry nobility access to the king when he withdrew to his private quarters.\textsuperscript{12} In this configuration there was no direct correlation between physical proximity to the monarch and the amount of power a courtier could acquire. Henry VIII reversed his father’s policy and revived the medieval model of court power, which Starkey has labeled “the power of intimacy.”\textsuperscript{13} During the first decade of Henry VIII’s reign, the king replaced the privy chamberers of low birth with noble favourites. The first position that grew important enough to befit an aristocrat was the Groom of the Stool, followed then, by the gentlemen of the privy chamber. These noble privy chamber


\textsuperscript{11} Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 197; David Loades, The Tudor Court (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987), 40-41, states the court was originally divided between the Hall and the Chamber, but both Starkey and Loades agree that the Privy Chamber broke away from the Chamber to form it own distinct third department.

\textsuperscript{12} Starkey, “Intimacy and Innovation,” 11; Starkey, “Court, Council, and Nobility,” 175.

\textsuperscript{13} Starkey, “Intimacy and Innovation,” 77; although Starkey does not use that exact phrase, his essay, “Representation through Intimacy,” 187-224, is primarily concerned with fleshing out the power of intimacy in terms of how the gentlemen of the privy chamber and the Groom of the Stool manifested itself in their ability to represent the monarch in a variety of capacities.
servants performed duties that dealt both with the king’s bodily needs in his private chambers and the crown’s governmental policies in both the domestic and international arenas. Soon the privy chamber also took control of the monarch’s personal cash, the privy purse, and the Dry Stamp, which was used by the monarch to sign documents.\footnote{Starkey, “Intimacy and Innovation,” 94-97.}

According to Starkey’s model, the privy chamber became the central locus of court politics as its members assumed more and more administrative duties and had unrivaled access to the monarch.

The men who staffed Henry VIII’s privy chamber were able to become key political players at court because of their constant access to the monarch, who in the early modern period, had, for the most part, broken the power of the feudal lords and had became the sole center of power and rewards. Personal monarchy was England’s form of government, and so (according to Starkey), it was their personal relationship with the king that gave the privy chamber men their political importance. Surrounding the monarch almost all of the time put these men first in line to receive the crown’s royal patronage which took the forms of annuities, lands, titles of nobility, and government positions. Moreover, by being in close physical proximity to the monarch, a courtier would have the opportunity to exert influence over the king. Once Henry VIII packed the privy chamber with the nobility, they fought over access to the monarch in order to advance themselves, their families, and their political aims. This struggle to control access to the king, and thus, to control who received royal patronage and influence the king’s political policies, has been identified by some scholars as faction.\footnote{Starkey does not yet name the issue of faction, but he is building up to it. See also E.W. Ives, \textit{Faction in Tudor England} (London: The Historical Association, 1979).} The role of
faction in Tudor politics, however, is a highly contested issue—some scholars have viewed it as the primary engine of political conflict while others downplay its importance. As will be discussed further on in the introduction, the issue of faction also has a place in Elizabethan political historiography—mostly in terms of trying to establish whether or not it existed at Elizabeth’s court.

Starkey’s model of “the politics of intimacy” is largely dependent upon the early modern “semi-mystical aspects of kingship” which turned the monarch’s physical body into the ultimate symbol of the political office of monarch. The early modern legal theory of the monarch’s two bodies stipulated that the office of monarch, also referred to as the “body politic,” was an eternal office that temporarily resided in the physical, or “natural,” body of the king. Although an individual king would die, the office of monarch never died and could be transferred to another natural body. Even though this political theory was not accepted or utilized by every Tudor jurist, Elizabeth I demonstrated her cognizance of this theory in her first speech to her nobles at Hatfield House on 20 November, 1558, in which she stated, “I am but one body naturally considered, though by His [God’s] permission a body politic to govern.” Elizabeth’s statement not only utilizes the rhetoric of the monarch’s two bodies, but also refers to the relationship

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16 Two of the important case studies of the role of faction at Henry VIII’s court are the fall of Cardinal Wolsey and the downfall of Anne Bolyen. In the case of Wolsey, see Starkey, “Intimacy and Innovation,” 103; Ives, Faction in Tudor England, 16, and Anne Bolyen (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), 131-152. G.W. Bernard presents an alternate view in “The Fall of Wosley Reconsidered,” The Journal of British Studies 35 (July 1996), 227-310. In the case of Anne Bolyen, G.W. Bernard in “The Fall of Anne Bolyen,” Power and Politics in Tudor England (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2000), 80-107, argues against Ives, who believes that Boleyn was a victim of faction, and instead, that Anne fell from grace because she had in fact committed the crimes of incest and adultery, and that faction was not the powerful force driving the events of Henry VIII’s reign. I’ll discuss the role of faction in Elizabethan politics later on in the introduction and again in chapter one.

17 Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 188-191.

18 Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 188.

between the monarch and the divine, which reinforced the sacrosanctity of the monarch’s physical body. As Starkey has argued, it was only because the monarch’s body was considered sacred that the privy chamberer’s care of the physical body of the king was endowed with such political import.

It was this intimacy with the royal body that became not only the platform for the privy chamber’s political importance in terms of a space to influence the monarch, but also the source of the political ability to represent the monarch in three ways. First, the privy chamber men represented the king in their ability to pass on the monarch’s commands and have these commands obeyed as if the king had given them directly. Secondly, they could represent his “charismatic presence” such as their ability to stand in for the king on the battlefield. Lastly, there were some occasions where these two functions combined and they were able to act as the “full royal alter ego.”

For example, it was illegal to arrest someone without a warrant unless it was carried out in the king’s presence. However, if a gentleman of the King’s privy chamber was present, it was considered the equivalent of arresting someone in front of the king himself. Therefore, as long as the royal body was considered the physical embodiment of the majesty and the sovereignty of the office of monarch, serving the king was a prestigious and politically important job. As Starkey sums up, “The double operation of intimacy is now clear. On

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20 Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 192 discusses the general theory of the monarch’s two bodies legal theory and the semi-mystical aspects of kingship and then applies them to the Henrician case. For the Elizabethan case, see Marie Axton, The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and Elizabethan Succession (London: The Royal Historical Society, 1977), Ernst Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theory (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997) is the most comprehensive work on the evolution of the monarch’s two bodies legal theory. Levin 10-38 discusses Elizabeth as a sacred monarch and on 122-123 explores the Elizabethan application of the monarch’s two bodies theory.

21 Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 192, 197-200, 211, 213.

22 Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 200-210 here Starkey cites the example of Cardinal Wolsey who initially refused to submit to his arrest since the Earl of Northumberland refused to show his warrant, until he saw a member of the King’s privy chamber, whom Wolsey believed represented the king in “both presence and command.”
the one hand, through their bodily contact with the king, the Privy Chamber became in
themselves the direct symbols or representations of the charismatic aspects of royalty.
This was the mystical basis of their personification of the king.”

This politicized intimacy with the king’s body therefore, had two distinct repercussions for the noble and
gentry staff of the privy chamber. By being in close physical proximity to the king they
could control access to the king’s body, and thus, the source of political power and
rewards, and their attendance upon the king’s bodily needs also endowed these royal
servants with the ability to act as extensions of the king himself.

Starkey’s work has been critical in subsequent scholarly analyses of Elizabethan
female courtiers and the female privy chamber women in particular. However, it is only
the first half of the Starkey model of the privy chamber that has been utilized to assess
whether or not the queen’s female privy chamberers wielded the same political power as
their male predecessors. Pam Wright was the first scholar to study the Elizabethan privy
chamber through the Starkey model, but concluded that “frankly” Elizabeth’s privy
chamber women were not very important, and that “the Elizabethan privy chamber was a
household department in the narrowest sense of the term . . . it was essentially female,”
and therefore, “the result was a notable neutralization of the department.”

Under Elizabeth, the privy chamber kept its basic structure developed under Henry VIII. A very
broad sketch of the privy chamber reveals there were five main positions for women, four
ladies of the bedchamber, three chamberers, about thirteen ladies, gentlewomen, and
maids of the privy chamber, and a half a dozen maids of honor who were unsalaried as

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23 Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 211.
24 Pam Wright, “A Change in Direction: the Ramifications of a Female Household, 1558-1603,” in
David Starkey (ed.), The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War (New York: Longman
Inc, 1987), 172.
were the extraordinary women of the privy chamber who only came to court for special occasions. There were also eighteen women listed on the coronation account book as “Ladies and gentlewomen of the Household.” The female equivalent of the Groom of the Stool was the Chief Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber. There was also a small male component to the privy chamber consisting of two gentlemen of the privy chamber, eight grooms of the privy chamber, and the gentlemen ushers of the privy chamber who guarded the privy chamber’s doors.

According to Wright, these women’s political agency, and therefore, their importance were neutralized by their very bodies. For Wright, since the privy chamber women, unlike the Henrician male chamberers, were precluded from the formal political machinery in terms of administrative and government offices, they had no way to participate in politics. This does make sense if one only defines politics in a very narrow sense of formal, institutional decision making, and as Wright demonstrated, the privy chamber women were deprived of controlling the privy purse and the Dry Stamp, and their responsibilities were confined to taking care of Elizabeth’s body, food, dress, and furniture. However, such a narrow definition of politics does not take into account that in personal monarchy power was often directed through informal and personal relationships. Moreover, modern ideas about gender and what constitutes political as opposed to private activities have caused scholars to overlook the ways in which the “domestic” and the “political” often fused together in early modern monarchical

25 Wright 149-151. As discussed in Charlote Merton’s unpublished Ph.D dissertation, “The Women Who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553-1603,” (Cambridge University, 1992), 6, has a more specific breakdown of positions including the “ladies and gentlewomen of the household listed in the coronation account book, TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.53v-54r, but as she points out the contemporary records did not consistently label the women’s various privy chamber positions. I’ll discuss this problem in more detail in chapter 1.
26 Wright 148, Merton 5.
27 Wright 150, 152-3.
government. Therefore, Wright’s view of their role as body servants as purely domestic and unrelated to politics ignores the fundamental importance of “the politics of intimacy,” that taking care of the monarch’s body was a politicized act in and of itself since the monarch’s body was a politicized entity. Moreover, the privy chamber women’s close relationship with the queen, the queen’s body and the queen’s clothes enabled these women to perform the political act of representing the queen.

Interestingly, in Starkey’s assessment the privy chamber men’s ability to act as both royal servant and royal symbol did not strip these men of any “capacity for independent action,” whereas for Wright, the privy chamber by acting as extension of the queen politically neutralized them. For Wright these women were apolitical: their “domestic duties” were devoid of political import, their personal relationship with queen were predicated upon family ties making them unswervingly loyal to their royal kinswoman, they were unable to hold administrative or government offices, and they played no role in the faction Wright saw operating at court. Lastly she divorced the privy chamber women’s patronage activities from the realm of politics because she did not see them using patronage as a tool to push forward or challenge the political agendas of Elizabeth’s male privy councilors and government officers.

Wright’s conclusion that these women were politically neutral and reverted the privy chamber back to its original function under Henry VII as a barrier to faction and political struggle has set the parameters of the debate over the possibility of the privy chamber women participating in politics. Some historians like Simon Adams have accepted Wright’s portrayal of the Elizabethan privy chamber as a “cocoon” protecting

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28 Starkey, “Representation through Intimacy,” 192; Merton 168, 172.
29 Wright 147-172.
Elizabeth from faction as opposed to its Henrician characterization as a political cockpit where political careers were made and broken.\textsuperscript{30} Charlotte Merton’s 1992 unpublished doctoral dissertation, “The Women who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553-1603” was the first to challenge Wright’s conclusions about the political neutrality of the Elizabethan privy chamber. Although Merton draws exactly the opposite conclusion as Wright, she too utilizes the David Starkey model of the Tudor privy chamber where close physical proximity to the monarch automatically resulted in gaining political power. Merton presents the privy chamber women as power brokers, patrons, and spies, and concludes that nothing about the privy chamber changed just because a queen regnant came to the throne and required female privy chamber servants. These women were still politically important because of the constant attendance upon the queen guaranteeing them access to monarch and providing them with innumerable opportunities to influence the queen over issues of political patronage.\textsuperscript{31}

Merton’s rehabilitation of the role of women as brokers fits in with other historians understanding of early modern European patronage networks. As Wallace T. MacCaffrey has argued, the Crown used patronage as a political tool in order to reward the service of the political elite whose satisfaction with the crown was the foundation to political stability.\textsuperscript{32} Barbara Harris has also contributed to our understanding of the


\textsuperscript{31} Merton 8, 245.

process of royal patronage by emphasizing that since patronage networks often operated in conjunction with personal, informal relationships, this allowed women to participate within the patron-client system.\textsuperscript{33} Therefore, even if the actual fruits of patronage were not in of themselves political—an annuity for example—they served the larger political purpose of cultivating support for the monarch’s personal rule. And, even more importantly, women were involved in the formation, maintenance, and exploitation of patronage networks because patronage activities were often mapped onto personal relationships and activities such as gift-giving that until recently were not understood to be connected to politics.\textsuperscript{34} Merton’s dissertation’s main preoccupation was to demonstrate the various ways the Elizabethan privy chamber women used their close physical proximity to the queen to push forward their clients’ patronage and law suits. However, determining the extent of the privy chamber women’s political influence over patronage greatly depends upon whether or not every act of patronage was in fact political.

The other historiographical road block to determining whether or not women were political agents at court is the issue of court faction and whether or not Elizabethan privy chamber women participated in the factional struggle. Wright argues that because the women were politically neutral and only carried out “domestic” responsibilities such as


caring for the queen’s clothes, they were not cultivated by the male privy councilors or other government officials in their factional struggles, but her understanding of faction at the Elizabethan court is based upon an out-dated definition of faction first put forward by Conyers Read and Sir John Neale which conflated competition over patronage and controlling the queen’s favor with faction. Revisionist historians, like Simon Adams, Wallace MacCaffrey, and Paul E.J. Hammer, have built a new consensus that although there was constant competition for favor and rewards, faction only manifested itself—when it was, in Simon Adams’ strict definition, “a personal following employed in direct opposition to another personal following.”35 Under this narrower definition, faction only occasionally spilled over into struggles for patronage, but this was not considered the norm, but rather the “perversion of the patronage process.”36 Separating politics from faction allows scholars to identify new political activities and consequently new political players, such as the women of Elizabeth’s privy chamber.

Although Merton’s work was groundbreaking in fleshing out more of the day to day functions of the Elizabethan privy chamber, and for reconnecting women’s patronage activities to the realm of politics, her work has still left room for further exploration of women’s ability to participate in politics. As Natalie Mears has argued, Merton only conceived of Elizabethan female courtiers’ political importance in terms of patronage, but did not try to examine how they participated in other political activities such as the


36 Hammer, “Patronage at Court,” 68.
process of policy making, debate, and diplomacy which connected them to some of the
defining political issues of the reign such as Elizabeth’s marriage and the issue of
succession. Although Mears does demonstrate that the privy chamber women were
important at court for the dissemination of news about the queen’s health, moods, and
opinions about people, political events, and proposed policies (something Merton does as
well), she is still confined to connecting the privy chamber women to the narrow
definition of high politics. She does build upon the growing body of scholarship which
analyzes the role of news, information, and gender, and connects what has usually been
dismissed as “gossip” to the realm of politics, but news and women are only important if
connected to the realm of policy making. Mears, despite her emphasis on policy
making, does make another important connection in her work. Mears reiterates that the
Elizabethan privy chamber retained its initial “significance as representative of the
monarch” through its staff’s intimate service to the monarch’s body.

Mears’ work fits in with the bulk of the scholarship on the Elizabethan Privy
Chamber which has revolved around whether or not it was, in the words of Geoffrey
Elton, a site of “contact” between the monarch and the political elite. Elton rightfully
realized that historians will never be able to truly understand the way in which the
Elizabethan court functioned as a political center until the myth of the Virgin Queen who

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37 Natalie Mears, “Politics in the Elizabethan Privy Chamber: Lady Mary Sidney and Kat Ashley,” in James Daybell (ed.), Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700 (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), 68. She builds upon many of these arguments in her book, Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68-70, 107-114, 119-134, 142-144. I also think that Mears downplays many of Merton’s arguments in order to inflate the originality of her position. For women involved in the dissemination of news see Merton 171.

38 For scholarship that reexamines the role of gender and news in early modern England see, James Daybell “‘Suche newes as on the Quenes hye wayes we have mett’: the News and Intelligence Networks of Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury (c.1527-1608),” in James Daybell (ed.), Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700, (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), 114-131.

39 Mears, “Politics,” 78.

was completely in charge of courtiers, privy councilors, and her public image has been set aside and to realize that patronage was only one of the struggles through which politics was played out.\textsuperscript{41} Despite Elton’s foresight, he did not make the connection between court politics and court culture. Instead he pleaded, “we need no more reveries on accession tilts and symbolism, no more pretty pictures of gallants and galliars; could we instead have painful studies of Actry and Pantry, of vice-chamberlains and ladies of the Privy Chamber?”\textsuperscript{42} And yet, it is precisely by realizing that culture and politics were intertwined at the Elizabethan court that we can achieve a broader understanding of what constituted the political and consequently of who participated in politics. Portraiture, plays, sculpture, and ceremony served more than just an aesthetic purpose at Elizabeth’s court. Instead they often were the very means by which monarchical power reinforced itself.\textsuperscript{43}

Moreover, as many scholars have argued, items such as portraits and tombs were more than just aesthetic products and political propaganda tools, but that they also act as historical texts. Early modern families constructed historical documents out of a variety of media, including manuscript histories, portraits, and tomb monuments.\textsuperscript{44} Natalie Zemon Davis also provides a useful framework in which to examine these sources that

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\textsuperscript{41} Elton, “Tudor Government,” III, 53. \\
\textsuperscript{42} Elton, “Tudor Government,” III, 53. \\
\textsuperscript{43} Alastair Bellany, The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603-1660 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19-20, although working on Jacobean court scandal, Bellany also calls for a reassessment of what constitutes the political in his book and incorporates the model used by anthropologists such as Clifford Gertz. For an example of Clifford Geertz’s work see, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfights,” The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973), 412-453, has provided historians with a framework to understand ceremony and ritual as vehicles of political expression. \\
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often do not have one identifiable author but still focus upon the life of a woman. Davis argued that in the specific example of manuscript family histories, even if the authorship was uncertain, it was by its very nature a collaborative enterprise with an overarching goal of creating a sense of family identity by recording its accomplishments, which in turn would tie future generations to the family’s social, political, and economic enhancement. These family histories, however, were not written in a vacuum divorced from larger political events. Scholarship on Tudor-Stuart portraiture and tomb monuments suggests that they too served the same purpose of recording a family’s past accomplishments to justify their current social standing. Therefore, whether women were the authors or the subjects of these histories, they were deliberately incorporated into the family history, with their lives and accomplishments often providing the lynchpin that connected the family history to larger historical narratives.

The work of Elizabeth A. Brown also provides a fresh direction that will help overcome some of the limitations of past scholarship. Like Merton and Mears, Brown argues that the privy chamber women were politically powerful because of their constant attendance upon the monarch and their ability to connect the queen to networks of subjects, but expands her argument to suggest that these women also had a very public role in extending Elizabeth’s monarchical authority. Even though Brown does not cite Starkey, she once again highlights the connection between serving the monarch’s body

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and the power to act as an extension of the queen and “amplify her physical presence.”\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, Brown turned to a new source, William Shakespeare’s play, \textit{Antony and Cleopatra}, to contrast Cleopatra’s serving women with Elizabeth’s. Whereas Cleopatra’s attendants have no family ties to compete with their loyalty to their royal mistress, they are only useful as social companions, because they, unlike Elizabeth’s court women, are unable to connect the Egyptian queen to networks of support. Although Brown does not extend her argument about the importance of the privy chamber women’s role of acting as extensions of the queen outside of this one play, she does provide a foundation for further historical inquiry into women acting as a representation of the monarch. Her work also suggests that sources needed for this line of inquiry may lie within the realm of non-traditional sources such as dress, portraiture, tomb monument, and literature and that we need to treat them like historical texts.

As the title, \textit{Busy Bodies}, suggests, the main trajectory of this dissertation is to explore the connection between the privy chamber women’s service to the queen’s bodily needs and their ability to participate in politics. The most obvious level of meaning of the phrase is its reference to gossip and superficiality. However, just as recent scholarship has called into question the implicit and unquestioned assumptions about gender embedded in the construction of the definitions of “news” and “gossip” and the differences between them, I also want to contribute to a broader definition of the “political” and identify new arenas where politics was practiced. Although female bodies could not participate within the realm of politics in the same way men could, I argue that gender did not cut women off from exercising power at court, but shaped the way women could gain and use their power. And just as this dissertation works to expand our

\textsuperscript{47} Brown 132.
understanding of what constitutes the political, it also employs a broader understanding of the geography of where courtly struggles for power could be created and exercised. Participation in fashioning and spreading Elizabeth’s public image did not just take place in her immediate presence, but in also in churches, cathedrals, and in the houses of the gentry and aristocracy outside of London. 

The phrase “Busy Bodies” also connotes the corporeal character and demands of monarchy and in particular of queenship. As the dissertation title suggests, the bodily interactions between the queen and her serving women allow me to argue that by taking care of the queen’s bodily needs these women entered into a relationship with the body politic. I want to reintegrate the forgotten half of David Starkey’s model of the privy chamber, that the privy chamber women’s intimate connection to the queen’s body allowed them the political functions of helping Elizabeth construct her public image which underpinned her public authority, extending the queen’s royal presence outside of the palace walls where the queen resided, and connecting Elizabeth to a vast networks of subjects. The queen often appropriated their bodies, clothes, and service to construct or extend her own monarchical power. By acting as queenly surrogates who extended the queen’s authority to places she could not physically be, privy chamber women acquired higher status and more privileges than they otherwise would have held by birth or marriage. However, this special status and its privileges also created tension between the queen and her uniquely empowered female courtiers. While women were more often part of the processes that connected Elizabeth to larger circles of her subjects, they also had

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48 I am indebted to R. Malcom Smuts, Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Modern England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 53-66, and his “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Change at the Court of James I,” in Linda Levy Peck (ed.), The Mental World of the Jacobean Court (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 103-4, who has argued in the early Stuart context that “the court” was not confined to the palace which housed the queen.
the potential to disrupt these relationships. Therefore, understanding how the queen interacted with other women is necessary if we are to understand Elizabeth’s reign as a whole.

In chapter one, “Fleshing out the Women at Elizabeth’s Court,” I have two main goals. In the first half of the chapter, I go into detail about the make up of the privy chamber and the women who served in it and their primary responsibilities. However, it is important to keep in mind that not every woman at Elizabeth’s court was a member of the privy chamber. Some women became close friends of Elizabeth or were closely related to her. Many of these women still spent a great deal of time with her, but were not officially members of the privy chamber staff. Female courtiers, whether they were of the privy chamber or not, still participated in the system of royal patronage as patrons. Instead of joining in the historiographical debate over whether or not women wielded political influence as patrons, I choose to focus upon how these women participated in the larger machinery of patronage instead of judging the privy chamber women as effective political agents solely on their ability or inability to get their clients’ suits successfully resolved with or without the help of male councilors and government officials. I use the correspondence of one Elizabethan courtier and government official, Sir Robert Sidney, in conjunction with other courtiers’ letters, to explore the tools used to negotiate the politics of royal favor and the way in which women used them. One of the most important findings in this chapter is that women served a dual purpose in the patronage system. They not only acted as their clients’ eyes and ears, but as the queen’s mouthpiece. Acting as an extension of the queen, relaying her pleasure or displeasure
with a subject, was not a sign of political neutrality, but rather one of their most important political roles.

In subsequent chapters, I step outside the realm of patronage, connect the political sphere to the cultural sphere (analyzing material and visual culture, clothes, portraits, and tomb monuments), and draw from recent gender-historical scholarship on agency and female interaction, to identify other ways Elizabeth I and her serving women mutually constructed each other’s power. Chapter Two, “Fashioning Monarchy: Clothes, Power and Politics at Court,” builds upon chapter one’s analysis of the system of royal patronage by examining the exchange of clothing at the Elizabethan court. Politics was deeply embedded in the multi-tiered system of courtly gift exchange. Elizabeth’s subjects used gifts to the queen in an attempt to exercise power over her by making the queen feel obligated to return a favor to the gift-giver. Gifts of cloth, clothes, and clothing accessories were important tools of domestic and international statecraft creating ties between the giver and the receiver of the gift. Systematized exchanges of dress and its accessories at Elizabeth’s court constituted a space in which subject and monarch could fashion each other’s political identity. This system of sartorial exchange had many levels: consulting others on what to give, helping people obtain gifts, presenting the gift, recording or relaying Queen Elizabeth’s reactions to gifts, and maintaining the gifts once received. Moreover, it is through an examination of the courtly system of sartorial gift exchange that historians can more accurately and centrally analyze the role of women in Elizabethan politics; for through sartorial gifts women were able to participate in multiple political acts, including the construction of Elizabeth’s public image and the creation of

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49 Klein 466, she also gives an example of the queen exchanging gifts so that both she and the recipient of her gift would remember each other 474.
ties to the monarch that could be used for political favors. Through the analysis of the circulation of gifts of dress and dress accessories our understanding of the use of clothing and the creation of majesty becomes more nuanced. Monarchs did not simply use gorgeous dress to create a majestic setting to awe a passive audience, but rather, courtiers, including female courtiers, often participated in the performance of monarchical majesty and supplied the media that manufactured it.

Chapter three, “Queenly Bodies: the Role of Women in the Construction of Queenship,” complicates the historical paradigm of the monarch’s two bodies. As many scholars have demonstrated, Elizabeth’s gender placed restrictions upon her “natural” body which did not apply to male monarchs. The main bodily restriction was that Elizabeth had to be chaste, and thus, needed to cultivate her public image as a virgin as long as she remained unmarried. However, Elizabeth required her female courtiers’ assistance in protecting and projecting her virginal image. As Laura Gowing has argued, in urban and rural households control over women’s bodies and sexuality was not confined to male magistrates or patriarchal fathers, but women too held a moral authority and power over women’s bodies and used that power to enforce women’s subordination. The duty of Elizabeth’s women to both enforce and protect Elizabeth’s sexual reputation, and consequently, her monarchical authority, reflected the larger cultural role that early modern women exercised over other women’s bodies. Controlling

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and projecting the queen’s virginity is only one of the corporeal aspects of queenship explored in this chapter. Elizabeth also used her clothes and body as well as those of her privy chamber women to construct, amplify, and extend her monarchical presence to places where she could not physically be, sometimes even allowing the women to act as a royal surrogate. However, there was also constant friction between the queen and her women as Elizabeth tried to regulate the bodies of her privy chamber women, revealing how the interactions between Elizabeth’s body and the bodies of her female courtiers fashioned the queen’s monarchical image and the political alliances that shaped court politics.

The final chapter, “Grave Histories: Female Funerary Monuments Writing Elizabethan Histories,” argues that women were capable of considerable political agency at court and that their tombs and portraits were used to write histories of Elizabeth I’s reign, histories which scholars have hitherto ignored. Examining the tombs and portraits of court women reveals how women’s bodies, memories, and activities were manipulated, excluded, or included to create histories of Elizabeth’s reign. Most of the histories told by the tombs’ epitaphs and sculpture present highly edited histories of an individual and his or her family’s connection to the queen and their role in England’s politics. Some of these personal histories appropriated the Cult of the Virgin Queen of Elizabeth I as a model Protestant ruler, but other women and their families use their funerary monuments as sites to challenge England’s glowing memory of Elizabeth I. However, the choice to glorify or critique Elizabeth, to include or exclude a female relative’s court service, was a deliberate one made to either attach the family’s importance to that of the Crown or to define the family’s importance as independent from
the monarchy. In either case the tomb monuments of Elizabethan court women
demonstrate once more how the image and power of the queen was intertwined with the
image and power of her serving women.

These four chapters work together to both re-insert women into the reign of
Elizabeth I and to illuminate the various roles women played at the court of the last Tudor
monarch. The conclusion elaborates upon the commitment of each chapter to create a
more nuanced understanding of women’s power in the reign of Elizabeth I. Although
Elizabeth I had no intention of arguing for the equality of women and men, the reign of a
female monarch did create a space where women could exercise more authority than their
gender or social rank would have ordinarily allowed them. Elizabeth I was born of a
woman, was christened in the Protestant faith while being held by a woman, was raised
as a princess by women, and ruled with, among, and over women. It is time for the
histories of Elizabeth I’s reign to acknowledge and examine the various ways women
busied themselves around her body at court. No longer can historians assume that female
bodies were excluded from governmental bodies. The corporeal element of monarchy
must be acknowledged and explored, not only in terms of the physical person of the
monarch, but also in terms of the bodies of the men and women who surrounded the
ruler. Bodies count, including the female bodies that inhabited Queen Elizabeth I’s court.
Chapter 1:
Fleshing Out the Women at Elizabeth’s Court

A charming story exists about how one young woman started her court career under Elizabeth I. According to the story, on 1 January 1561, New Year’s day, which was traditionally reserved for courtiers to present a gift to the queen usually in the form of jewels or money, Sir Humphrey Radcliffe gave the queen a very unusual gift indeed; he “brought forward his daughter Mary and laughingly presented her as a New Year’s gift. Elizabeth being in high good humor, replied graciously that she would take Mary to be one of her Maids of Honor.”¹ Mary’s legendary start at court was only one of the exceptional aspects of her court career. Even though Elizabeth’s maids of honor did not receive any financial recompense, but were financially provided for by their families, the queen granted Radcliffe a stipend of £40 a year.² Arguably, Radcliffe differed most from her maidenly cohorts in that she did not use her position to contract an advantageous

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¹ I have not been able to trace this story any further back than to Violet A. Wilson, Queen Elizabeth’s Maids of Honor and Ladies of the Privy Chamber (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1923), 41 for the quoted passage, 38 for the date. Wilson continues with the anecdote explaining that Elizabeth was happy to accept such a gift since the maids had been decimated in number by Lady Jane Seymour’s death and Lettice Knollys’ marriage. However, this is based upon misreading Lady Seymour’s tomb monument which states her death in March 1560, but when reading Henry Machyn’s diary, in John Gough Nichols (ed.), The Diary of Henry Machyn: Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London, from AD 1550 to AD 1563 [The Camden Society] (London: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1848), 254, which recounts her funeral, it becomes apparent that her tomb followed the old calendar when the new year started in March. As for Lettice Knollys, according to the Coronation Account book, TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.53v, she first started off in Elizabeth’s employ as one of the “Maides of the Privye Chamber” a category distinct from the “Maides of Honour” listed on TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.54r. As Charlotte Merton, “The Women Who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553-1603,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1992), 14, explains the “Maides of the Privy Chamber” became combined with the group of “the ladies and gentlwomen of the privy chamber.” I will discuss the organization of the privy chamber further on in this chapter. Unfortunately, Wilson’s superficial treatment of this story is typical in terms of how Elizabethan court women have been treated in both amateur and professional histories, but that has not kept it from being repeated, see e.g., Patricia Fumerton, Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 43.

² TNA, E 351/2791 2d, which states that “Mrs Mary Radclyffe one of the maidens of honour for her stipend of xli p. annum for two years and a haulf,” which means, although the queen was atypically generous to Radcliffe, her largess was typically paid intermittently. I came to this document through Simon Adams, “Radcliffe, Mary,” ODNB, online edn, October 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/92795, accessed 7 August 2007], and Merton, Appendix I: Membership in the Privy Chamber, 251, 266.
marriage. Instead, after she became too old to be on the marriage market (or after it became clear that she had withdrawn herself from it), she found a place as an unwaged gentlewoman by 1587.³

The story of Mary Radcliffe’s introduction to Elizabethan court life reveals many of the problems historians face when trying to study court women. Although Radcliffe’s career is atypical in some ways, unfortunately one of the things she does share with many of her fellow privy chamber women is a lack of contemporary documents recording her court activities. Many of the stories historians cite concerning the women at Elizabeth’s court are anecdotes contained in other secondary sources which cannot be traced to firm primary source evidence. The little that does exist about Radcliffe points to her taking care of Elizabeth’s jewels and clothes and receiving requests from relatives to help them obtain the queen’s permission for one venture or another.⁴ These two functions may not seem related, but in fact they are. As stated in the introduction, the women who served Elizabeth in the privy chamber took care of the queen’s bodily needs, such as her clothes, which put them in close physical proximity of the queen. The privy chamber women and other female courtiers who provided Elizabeth with companionship had perpetual access to the queen. Constantly surrounding the queen provided these women with the opportunity to gain favor and rewards for themselves, their families, their friends, and their clients. However, understanding how these women used their close proximity to the queen to act as bridges connecting the queen to vast networks of subjects requires further explanation of how the privy chamber was organized, who these women were who

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³ Adams, “Ratclife, Mary” ODNB online ed.
⁴ I will go in to greater detail the various sources that deal with Elizabeth’s clothes and jewels in chapter 2. As per her involvement with the Manners’ family, the Earl and Countess of Rutland, see Adams, “Radcliffe, Mary” ODNB online ed., and HMC Rutland, I, 232, 278, 318, 321.
fulfilled these positions, what their duties involved both in terms of responsibilities and of benefits, and finally how they used their service to the queen to serve their clientage and familial networks.

Most of the past scholarship that has focused upon the privy chamber women has debated whether or not these women were involved in politics by determining whether or not they were involved in political patronage. As discussed in the introduction, some scholars, particularly Pam Wright, have concluded that the privy chamber was demoted to a purely domestic department once it was staffed by women who were precluded from administrative offices. The Privy Chamber, consequently, was stripped of important governmental administrative functions, and no female member of the privy chamber, unlike their male predecessors, controlled the Privy Purse or the Dry Stamp. In terms of the historiography of the early modern English privy chamber, this loss of administrative duties has resulted in historians closely examining Elizabethan privy chamber women’s patronage to assess whether or not they were political agents at court. While this chapter will examine women’s involvement in court patronage in terms of grants of nobility, land, and offices, I think it is also important to recognize the larger system of court patronage and court women’s place within it, instead of judging the privy chamber women’s ability as political patrons solely based upon their success rates in getting their clients’ suits resolved. Understanding that the privy chamber women helped their clients’ suits by using their time with the queen and her councilors to build up their clients’ credit or reputation reveals what the political currency was that clients and patrons were trading in to acquire rewards and riches. Thus historians can gain a more nuanced understanding

of the tools used to negotiate the politics of royal favor and the rewards that often accompanied it, by closely examining the correspondence of some of those men and women who were not at court, but still sought to further their suits through Elizabeth’s privy chamber women.

**Ladies, Gentlewomen, and Maids**

The first women to serve Elizabeth in her privy chamber are listed in the coronation account book which records all expenses incurred for the event, including all the material distributed to the members of the queen’s household and the nobility who would participate in the coronation festivities. According to the account book the female members of the privy chamber staff were divided into the following groups: there were four women who served specifically in “the bedchamber,” three women under the category of “chamberers,” seven women who served “in the privie chamb[e]r withoute wage,” six who served as maids of the privy chamber, six maids of honor who were looked after by one woman, the mother of the maids, eleven women who served as “extraordinary” members of the privy chamber who only needed to be in attendance “when the Quenes Ma[jes]tie calleth for them.” Under the ambiguous category title of “Ladies and gentlewomen of the Household,” eighteen women were listed. In no other document are all these gradations mentioned, and many of these groups seemed to have been lumped together in subsequent documentation. For example, the maids of the privy

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6 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f. 53v-54r, lists the names of the women who were assigned to the privy chamber.
7 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f. 53v-54r.
8 Merton 6. Wright 149-151 does not make as many distinctions among the privy chamber women. Wright groups the women as ladies of the bedchamber, gentlewomen of the privy chamber, chamberers, and unpaid members such as the unpaid ladies of the privy chamber, the extraordinary ladies and gentlewomen, and the maids of honor; Wright makes no mention of the ladies and gentlewomen of the household.
chamber appear to have been subsumed into the broad category of ladies and
gentlewomen of the privy chamber. Moreover, Elizabeth’s funeral expense account book
does not use these same categories. Privy chamber women if they were members of the
peerage were not listed by their household position, but rather under their noble title. The
non-aristocratic privy chamber women were the only women explicitly listed under their
privy chamber position as maids of honor, ladies of the privy chamber, or the ladies and
“others” of the privy chamber. Such vague and inexact documentation makes it much
more difficult to ascertain which women served in the privy chamber under what
capacity.

As Charlotte Merton pointed out, as long as the women who were supposed to get
paid got paid, no one was very particular about listing their titles accurately on the
expense records. Merton’s observation about payment brings up another important
distinction among the privy chamberers some were paid offices and others served
“without wage[s].” Ladies of the bedchamber and ladies and gentlewomen of the privy
chamber were paid an annual salary of £33 6s. 8d., but women who served as
“chamberers” were only paid only £20 per annum. The highest position in the privy
chamber was the chief gentlewoman of the privy chamber, but she was not paid a higher
salary than the other ladies of the bedchamber. These salaries pale in comparison to

9 TNA, LC 2/4/4 f.45r-46r.
10 Merton 6.
11 Merton 12-13; Wright, 150-151.
12 Merton 12-13; Wright, 150-151. Another problem with this title is that I can only trace two
women in this office, Catherine Ashley from 1558 until her death in 1565 and Blanche Parry who assumed
the role upon Ashley’s death and held it until her own in 1590. However, the main documents who
consistently distinguished the chief gentlewoman, The New Year’s gift rolls, does not identify whose
Parry’s successor was. There are two possibilities. The first possibility, the woman who assumed this role
may have been a noblewoman. As seen in the funeral account book TNA, LC 2/4/4, the aristocratic women
of the privy chamber were identified by their title of nobility not their privy chamber position. The second
possibility is that Elizabeth refused to name a successor, just as she let other offices remain unfilled during
some of the male officers’ annual income: William Cecil, for instance, had an official salary for being Master of the Wards of £133. In addition to the group of “privy women without wages,” other members who served without a salary were the maids of honor and the extraordinary gentlewomen of the privy chamber. And yet, in spite of these relatively paltry salaries, there was intense competition for these positions, which speaks to the larger importance of being a member of the privy chamber. It was a mark of favor for a family to place one of its female relatives in a position that required strict attendance upon the monarch who was believed to be the primary source of favor and rewards. A woman who was in the privy chamber, whether a high ranking woman whose main duty was to serve as an attendant or one of the lowlier chamberers whose tasks involved much more menial work, still had much envied access to the queen. Regardless of their exact individual task or position, women who served in the privy chamber were important because they formed a group of women who served, and thus, surrounded the queen, as will be illustrated throughout the rest of the chapter.

All of the privy chamber positions were highly coveted and subject to fierce competition. In a letter dated 27 April 1597 one courtier wrote about one lady of the privy chamber, Lady Leighton, who threatened to resign her privy chamber position if the

the last decade of her reign. Although the female offices of the privy chamber are not included in the discussion, for Elizabeth’s refusal to fill vacant positions at the end of her reign see Linda Levy Peck, “Peers, Patronage, and the Politics of History,” in John Guy (ed.), The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 91-97.

As discussed in the introduction, the chief gentlewoman was the closest female counterpart to the male Groom of the Stool, but their exact duties were not the same since the Privy Purse was taken away from Ashley and given to a groom of the privy chamber and the Secretary took control of the Dry Stamp, Wright 149-153. David Starkey explains the rise of the Groom of the Stool under Henry VIII in “Intimacy and Innovation: the Rise of the Privy Chamber, 1487-1547,” in David Starkey (ed.), The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War (New York: Longman, 1987), 78.

13 John Guy, “Introduction: The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth?,” in John Guy (ed.), The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade, (New York: Cambridge University, 1995), 8. Of course, as Guy points out, this does not include the thousands of pounds Cecil was able to acquire in the form of bribes and “arrangement fees.”

14 Merton 6.
queen denied her suit for a grant over a piece of property. According to the letter, if Lady Leighton left court, there was “already a whole Dosen of Ladies, that would succeed her in the Bedchamber; but it is thought that either my Lady Hoby, my Lady Borow, or my Lady Thomas Howard, shall haue yt.” As this letter indicates, there were multiple women waiting for an opening in the privy chamber staff so that they could join it.

Consequently, any vacancy was quickly filled. In 1599 when one of the maids of honor, a Mrs Radcliffe died (not the Mary Radcliffe mentioned in the beginning of this chapter), her position was filled before she was buried! Lady Elizabeth Southwell who filled Mrs Radcliffe’s vacant position left at least two women, a mother and daughter, disappointed: “My Lady Newton sought yt fir her Daughter.” Both Elizabeth Southwell and Lady Newton’s daughter were well connected to the court. Lady Newton could easily be Lady Katherine Paston-Newton who was serving in the privy chamber when Mrs Radcliffe’s position opened up. Even though Lady Newton was in an excellent position to bring her daughter into the fold, Lady Elizabeth Southwell’s connections were even stronger. Southwell’s grandparents were the Earl and Countess of Nottingham. The countess was one of the queen’s cousins and closest friends and a Lady of the Bedchamber. The earl was a member of the privy council and lord chamberlain, which would have given him a great deal of influence over Elizabeth’s decision to appoint new members to her privy

15 Rowland Whyte Esq., to Sir Robert Sidney, 27 April 1597, in Arthur Collins (ed.), Letters and Memorials of State in the Reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, King James I, King Charles the First, Part of the Reign of Charles the Second and Olivers’s Usurpation (London, 1747; reprinted AMS Press, 1973), II, 45. Although I am not sure if Lady Leighton won her suit for Eltam Park, she was listed as one of the “Ladies of the Privy Chamber” who received black material for her mourning garments in the queen’s funeral procession in 1603, TNA, LC2/4/4 f.45r.
16 Whyte to Sidney, 15 November 1599, in Letters and Memorials, I, 141 states that “In Mrs. Ratcliffe’s Place, the faire yong Mrs. Southwell is to be admitted.” It is not until a letter dated 23 November 1599 that Whyte discusses Mrs Southwell’s funeral which took place the day he wrote the letter, see Letters and Memorials, II, 142.
17 Whyte to Sidney, 5 January 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 156.
chamber. Moreover, Southwell’s mother had also served in Elizabeth’s privy chamber.\(^{18}\) Therefore, it is possible that Lady Southwell got the position because she had more relatives, male and female, to influence the queen’s decision.

Although Lady Newton was unsuccessful in obtaining a privy chamber position for her daughter, many women who served in the privy chamber successfully sought out positions for their female relatives. Lady Catherine Carey-Knollys, who was appointed one of the four ladies of the bedchamber at Elizabeth’s accession, had three of her daughters serve in the privy chamber during Elizabeth’s reign. Lady Dorothy Stafford, a widow who served in the privy chamber and was a close companion of the queen, surely played a role in the appointment of her daughter Elizabeth Stafford to the privy chamber; after all she had no husband to put forth the suit. Blanche Parry, another woman who had close ties to Elizabeth and served in the privy chamber until Parry’s death in 1590, was probably responsible for her cousin Frances Vaughan’s appointment as a maid of honor in the 1570s.\(^{19}\) Anne Clifford believed that her aunt, the Countess of Warwick, would have been able to get her appointed to the queen’s privy chamber, writing in her diary, “if Queen Elizabeth had lived she intended to prefer me to be of the Privy Chamber for at that time there was much hope and expectation of me as of any other young Ladie whatsoever.”\(^{20}\) One courtier reported an interesting and exceptional episode when the young lady, Kate Bulkly was rumored to replace the maid of honor, Anne Russell who

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\(^{18}\) Merton 39, only credits the Countess of Nottingham with Southwell’s success at winning the position over Newton’s daughter in order to argue that it was female relatives who were instrumental in these suits, not male relatives. However, the Earl of Nottingham was too important a member of the queen’s household and government to overlook. He is also credited for Southwell’s success in Catherine Loomis, “Elizabeth Southwell’s Manuscript Account of the Death of Queen Elizabeth,” \textit{ELR} 26:3 (1996), 487-88.

\(^{19}\) Merton 39-40.

was about to get married. It was said that “her Father [was] vnwilling,” but “her mother [was] most willing vnto yt.”21 It is unclear why the father was hesitant to let his daughter fill such a prestigious position, especially since the mother supported the idea. Although speculative at best, perhaps we might infer that the father was concerned about his daughter’s sexual reputation since the queen’s maids of honor had undergone a series of sexual scandals in the past decade.22 Perhaps the mother, if she had friends or relatives already at court or in the privy chamber, felt more secure about her daughter’s ability to maintain her chastity. Mrs. Bulkly’s situation of an unwilling father seems unique. Even though women often played important roles in helping their female relatives obtain privy chamber positions that did not mean that men did not value these positions. As revealed in the anecdote about Mary Radcliffe’s father offering her as a maid of honor to the queen, men too tried to obtain privy chamber positions for the female relatives. Sir Arthur Throckmorton campaigned very hard to get his sister, Elizabeth Throckmorton, into the privy chamber. 23 And the Earl of Nottingham may have played a pivotal role in his granddaughter’s appointment as a maid of honor.

Families coveted privy chamber positions for their female relatives because they involved close attendance upon the monarch who was the font of power. The monarchy was not an abstract institution, but one defined by the personality of the individual who inhabited it. It was the monarch who ultimately decided who was given lands, annuities, monopolies, membership to the peerage, placement on the privy council or any other office. As David Starkey has argued, “nearness—intimacy—was the key to the Privy

21 White to Sidney, 16 May 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 195.
Chamber’s success” under Henry VIII, and although the women who served in Elizabeth’s privy chamber could gain no other office for themselves, they were still important and their importance rested upon the same foundation. Although they could not sit on the privy council, they still interacted with its male members, and most importantly, they interacted daily with the queen. Elizabeth followed the same patterns when she staffed her privy council and her privy chamber; she tended to choose her relatives and those who served her while she was a princess. Two ladies of the bedchamber, Catherine Ashley and Blanche Parry had served Elizabeth while she was a young child. Queen Elizabeth was also very close with another lady of the bedchamber, Lady Catherine Carey-Knollys, who was the niece of Elizabeth’s mother Ann Boleyn. When Lady Knollys died unexpectedly in 1569, Elizabeth’s grief over the loss of her cousin was even commented upon by Mary, Queen of Scots, who was living under house arrest in the north of England. Moreover, Lady Knollys’ husband, Sir Francis Knollys, served Elizabeth as a privy councilor.

The Knollys case was not unique; many of the men on the privy council had female relatives who served in the privy chamber. While Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester was not appointed to the privy council until 1562, one of his sisters, Lady Mary Sidney, served as a lady of the privy chamber without wages from the day of Elizabeth’s

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25 Hatfield House, UK, Cecil MSS 155/100r, in a letter from Nicholas Whyte to William Cecil, dated 26 February 1569, which relates a visit by White to Mary, Queen of Scots who was under house arrest at Tutbury castle states that even Mary, Queen of Scots had heard how Elizabeth’s “felicitics gave place to some natarrall passions of grief . . . for the death of hir kinswoman and good friend.” Mary may have heard about the news, because she was under the supervision of the Earl of Shrewsbury, and his wife, Elizabeth Talbot, who had been appointed to the privy chamber in 1559, and although she had since left that position she still retained friends and contacts there. See Mary Lovall, Bess of Hardwick: Empire Builder (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).
coronation.\textsuperscript{26} Indeed, Lady Sidney was one of three Dudley sisters who either officially or unofficially (as a close friend of the queen) served in the privy chamber. As will be discussed in later chapters, the few episodes that brought Leicester in disfavor with the queen were his sexual dalliances with Elizabeth’s maids of honor and his marriage to Lettice Knollys, a daughter of Lady Catherine Carey-Knollys, who had served as a maid of the privy chamber at the time of Elizabeth’s accession. Even though Leicester’s marriage brought him periods of disfavor with the queen, it also added to his female retinue of relatives in the privy chamber, since two of Lettice’s sisters also served in the privy chamber, Elizabeth Knollys, later Lady Leighton and Anne Knollys, who through marriage became the Baroness of De La Warr. Dudley’s brother, Ambrose, another member of the privy council, married for his third wife, Anne Russell, a maid of honor who through her marriage was promoted to an extraordinary woman of the bedchamber.\textsuperscript{27} A working relationship between the Countess of Warwick and the Earl of Essex, her step-nephew, in the mid-1590s is revealed in the letters Rowland White sent to his employer, Robert Sidney, son of Lady Mary Sidney, and nephew of the Countess of Warwick. William Brooke, tenth Lord Cobham, who served Elizabeth in major government positions from the beginning of her reign, and was appointed to the privy council in 1586, had “for over forty years . . . a sister or a wife or a daughter in favoured familiarity with” Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{28} Indeed, Cobham took as his second wife in 1560, Frances Newton, who

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{26} For Leicester, see Simon Adams, “Dudley, Robert, Earl of Leicester,” \textit{ODNB}, XVII, 95. For Mary Sidney’s appointment to the privy chamber see TNA, LC 2/3/4 f. 53r.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Simon Adams, “Dudley [née Russell], Anne,” \textit{ODNB}, XVII, 63-64.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Cobham’s sister, Elizabeth Brooke married Catherine Parr’s brother, William, and through her Parr connection became a very close and influential companion of the queen, David McKeen, \textit{A Memory of Honor: The Life of William Brooke, Lord Cobham} (Salzburg, Vienna: Institut fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universtate Salzburg, 1986), I, 53-55, 75, 89-93. Elizabeth Brooke, Marchioness of Northampton, did not appear to have held an official position in the privy chamber, but her close friendship with the queen made her a person important at court; even ambassadors cultivated the Lady Marquess’
\end{itemize}
served Elizabeth in the privy chamber from 1558 until her death in 1592. Another member of the privy council, William Cecil, one of Elizabeth’s leading statesmen, had three successive generations of female relatives serve in some capacity in the privy chamber: his wife Mildred, daughter Anne who married the Earl of Oxford, and their daughters, Cecil’s granddaughters, Elizabeth de Vere and Susan de Vere. The women in these important court families held positions that complemented their male kin’s powerful court positions.

There were some privy chamber women whose position may have helped their husband’s court careers. As the reign progressed the queen also formed close attachments to other women who served in the less prestigious categories of service. For example, the historian W. J. Tighe has suggested for John Scudamore, although introduced to court through his father-in-law, Sir James Croft who was appointed comptroller of the Household in 1569, it was his (1573 or 1574) marriage to Mary Shelton, who had been appointed a chamberer in 1571, that “immeasurably increased his standing at court and his influence generally.” Tighe bases his assertion upon two factors: Shelton’s family friendship. Cobham’s second wife, Frances Newton, was a chamberer, but due to her marriage she rose in social status from the daughter of a knight to the wife of a peer and was promoted to a Lady of the Bedchamber, see Merton 13. For her appointment as a “chamberer” at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign see TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.53r. Her friendship with the queen has been commented upon by Julian Lock, “Brooke, William,” ODNB, VII, 918. One of his daughters, Elizabeth, was a chamberer in 1591 and was one of the leading statesmen towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign. His daughter, Elizabeth, was a goddaughter of the queen and “served the queen for many years before becoming the wife of the younger Cecil,” McKeen I, 151. I have yet to locate a record that testifies to her court position, but as the daughter and wife of leading courtiers, she could have easily been an unofficial attendant upon the queen.


30 W.J. Tighe, “Country into Court, Court into Country: John Scudamore of Holme Lacy (c.1542-1623) and His Circles,” in Dale Hoak (ed.), Tudor Political Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 163. As Tighe indicates since the marriage was secret, documentation for the marriage date has proven difficult to find, but he limits the possibilities to 10 November 1573 through 26 October 1574, possibly late December 1573 or January 1575.
connections and her position in the privy chamber. Mary Shelton was a cousin of Elizabeth’s from the Boleyn side; her paternal grandmother was a sister of Sir Thomas Boleyn, the queen’s maternal grandfather. At first the blood connection to the queen caused the Scudamores to suffer from Elizabeth’s wrath when she learned of their secret marriage. Despite the initial fury, their plan to ask for forgiveness rather than permission worked. Mary Shelton, now Scudamore, was at first “usid . . . very yell by the queen for hir marriage”; the queen was “liberall bothe with bloes and yevell wordes” and Mary was sent away from court for a short period. But by October 1574 Lady Scudamore was reinstated both in the privy chamber and in the queen’s good graces. Lady Scudamore’s privy chamber position connected her husband directly to the monarch which has led Tighe to posit that it was due to his wife’s ability to influence the queen that John Scudamore, a member of the gentry and not a noble, was made an officer of the Gentlemen Pensioners even though officers usually came from the nobility. Moreover, as Tighe points out, with the exception of the grooms of the privy chamber, the privy chamber was closed to men; the only way for most men to be connected to the privy chamber was through the women who surrounded the queen and knew her moods and

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31 Tighe 163.
32 A letter from Bridget Manners, a maid of honor wrote to Edward, Earl of Rutland, dated January 1576, as quoted in Tighe 163. HMC Rutland, I, 107, paraphrases the sentence that the queen used Mary Scudamore very ill, but does quote directly from the letter about the blows and curses heaped upon Lady Scudamore by the queen. For their secret marriage see Tighe 163.
33 Tighe 164. In addition to Tighe’s assessment, as I will discuss in chapter 2, the queen often gave gifts of clothing to her favored female courtiers, and Lady Scudamore received many such gifts after 1574. As Tighe 163, argued Elizabeth was furious over the secret marriage, not because she as a virgin resented all her courtiers’ marriages, but because being a relative of the queen politicized the marriage—Elizabeth would want to control who entered into the royal family, no matter how far removed that relative might be. Moreover, as a privy chamber woman, she did offer direct access to the queen, something else Elizabeth would want to control. Haigh 100-101, uses this episode to both present queen as an aging, bitter spinster, but grudgingly admits that “even at her most emotional, Elizabeth was at least partly political” arguing that she wanted to keep her privy chamber attendants from “becoming the pawns of political male politicians and place-seekers.”
overheard her conversations with ambassadors and privy councilors.\(^{34}\) John Scudamore was not the only man whose court career was strengthened by a marriage to a woman of the privy chamber. Sir William Drury’s marriage to Elizabeth Stafford, who served in the privy chamber and whose mother was a lady of the bedchamber, introduced him into court circles.\(^{35}\) Like Drury, Rowland Vaughn owed his court career entirely to a female relative in the privy chamber. His aunt, Blanche Parry, helped him get appointed to the queen’s guard.\(^{36}\) Vaughan later reminisced about his time at court, “I spent some yeares in Queen Elizabeths Court and saw the greatness and glory therof vnder the command of Mistres Blanch Parry (an honorable & Vertuous Gentlewoman, my Aunt and Mistresse.)”\(^{37}\) These examples, taken in conjunction with the examples of women helping their female relatives, speak to the larger role women played in advancing their families’ court careers by promoting both male and female relatives from their natal and/or their marital families.

Moreover, the members of the privy chamber and of the privy council shared more than just last names. As already discussed, daughters often replaced mothers in the privy chamber just as sons often replaced their fathers on Elizabeth’s privy council; all parties were to some extent usually related to the queen.\(^{38}\) To make it even more a family affair, sisters served in the privy chamber, sometimes simultaneously. Anne and Elizabeth Russell served as maids of honor together from around 1594 until 1600. The Russell girls served alongside another set of sisters and maids of honor, the Ladies

\(^{34}\) Tighe 164.
\(^{36}\) Peter R. Roberts, “Parry, Blanche,” *ODNB*, XLII, 864.
\(^{38}\) For the privy chamber Wright 158; for the privy council Haigh 72.
Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset, daughters of the Earl of Worcester. However, just as Elizabeth’s court and government provided a few young men without family ties to the court with opportunities to launch spectacular court careers like Sir Walter Raleigh and Christopher Hatton, a few women carved out for themselves a long and profitable court career despite no prior connection with Elizabeth or her courtiers. Helena Snackenborg came over as part of Princess Cecilia’s Swedish retinue during her 1565 visit to England, the same one the Lord and Lady Cobham were burdened to receive. On this visit, Helena was able to catch the eye of both the queen and her step-uncle, William Parr, Marquess of Northampton. Elizabeth convinced Princess Cecilia to part with her sixteen year old attendant, and made her a maid of honor before promoting her to a gentlewoman of the privy chamber. By 1571 the Marquess of Northampton had finally buried his estranged first wife and was free to marry Helena, making her the wife of one of the highest ranking English peers. Although her appointment to the privy chamber did not follow the usual channels, she too became a very close friend of the queen and acted as the chief mourner at Elizabeth’s funeral.

Another woman of rather mysterious origins, known only as “Ipolytane the Tartarian,” served Elizabeth in the privy chamber in the 1560s and provides yet another

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41 Parr had divorced his first wife in 1543, but Protector Somerset had refused to acknowledge the legal validity of this divorce, which then threw into question the validity of Parr’s 1548 second marriage to Elizabeth Brooke, sister to William Brooke who would become tenth Lord Cobham. Elizabeth I was very close to Lady Elizabeth Brooke and restored her and Parr to a place of prominence at court and never appeared to question their union. However, upon the second wife’s death in 1565, the queen was quick to remind Parr that he was not free to make a hasty third marriage to Helena Snackenborg. Parr and Snackenborg had to wait until 1571 when Parr’s first wife died to marry with the queen’s consent and blessing, which Elizabeth did bestow upon them. See McKeen I, 54, 89, 90
example of how people could enter into court service.\textsuperscript{42} It is very possible that she did come from the Central Asian Tartar tribe, since the clothes Elizabeth ordered for her often included furred cassocks.\textsuperscript{43} Scholars have speculated whether or not Ipolytane was a child or a woman dwarf.\textsuperscript{44} I think she was a child who was brought to court in much the same manner as the young African, “the lytle black a more,” who served Elizabeth as a page in 1574-5. Merton argues that she was a woman whose child was christened at court and to whom the queen bestowed the gift of a gold chain and a gold tablet to mark the occasion. However, the exact wording of the record states “A[mount] p[aid] to the Christeninge of Ipoltan the Tartarian.” If it had been her child that was being baptized, it would have read like the entry before it, “the Christening of the Lorde Barcke his Childe.”\textsuperscript{45} Therefore, Ipolytane was probably from Central Asia and a Muslim who converted to Christianity once she arrived at court. She was baptized in the same year she received her first set of livery from the queen, 1561.\textsuperscript{46} Another clue to Ipolytane’s age also comes from the warrants issued for the clothes Elizabeth ordered for her. In 1562 a warrant ordered Catherine Ashley, the chief gentlewoman of the privy chamber to receive

\begin{itemize}
\item Merton 98.
\item This woman’s name was spelled in a variety of ways, Ipolitane, Ipolitayne, and Ipolita. She was ordered furred cassocks in 1561 TNA, LC 5/33 p.8, 1564 TNA, LC 5/33 p.126, 1565 TNA, LC5/33 p.168 and 1567 LC5/34 p.43. Although Janet Arnold in Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe Unlock’d (Leeds, UK: W.S. Maney & Son, Ltd, 1988), 142, speculates that “cassocks” were a version of the French jupe or a looser version of the doublet which made riding easier and were worn by women in the 1540s and 1550s. The French juppe, in turn was another name for a “gasckyn” coat worn by the men of Gascony, many of whom were soldiers of fortune who rode on horseback. However, Elizabeth only order “cassocks” for Ippolita, one of her fools, William Shenton, and an African child who served Elizabeth as a page in 1574-5 (Arnold 105, 106) see also TNA, LC 5/34 p.283 for the African boy’s cassock and p.284 for Stenton’s. Moreover, the African boy is ordered both a cassock and a Gascon coat. I think it is telling that two of the three people ordered cassocks were people considered “foreign” or exotic which was part of their appeal to the queen in having them at court. The fool would have also been given exotic and unusual dress due to his function at court. Therefore, I think that the “cassocks” ordered for Ipolytane were not a garment typically found in the English woman’s closet, and probably associated with central Europe and possibly central Asia and the Middle East.
\item Arnold 107, belived she was a child and possibly a child dwarf whereas Merton 98, argues that she was a woman, possibly a woman dwarf.
\item BL, Harleian Roll V.18.
\item TNA, LC 5/33 p.6-7; p.8; p.10; p.13; p.14; p.15.
\end{itemize}
a pewter baby doll for Ipolytane. Although the evidence does seem to lean towards Ipolytane being a child, whether or not she was a child dwarf cannot be determined.

Elizabeth did employ female dwarves, and references to Thomasine “the Dwarfe” can be found in the records starting in 1579, and she served Elizabeth until the queen died in 1603; Thomasine was allotted black cloth to participate in Elizabeth’s funeral procession. The example of the foreign born Swedish noblewoman, the mysterious Ipolytane, and the dwarf Thomasine attest to some of the exceptional women who carved out court careers for themselves in spite of a lack of family network at court. However, these women were far more the exception than the rule, even in comparison to male courtiers, speaking to the fact that women had far fewer opportunities to attach themselves to the court. The only positions open to women of aristocratic and gentle birth were in the privy chamber.

Thus, the privy chamber shared many of the characteristics found in Elizabethan government at large: it was stable and run by the same favored families. Unlike her father’s privy chamber and privy council, there were no major staff changes or institutional overhauls. Unfortunately, there is a lot less documentation about the daily

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47 TNA, LC 5/33 p.10-11.
48 Merton 98; first mention in 1579 TNA, LC5/35 p.174-5; 178; 180; funeral accounts TNA, LC 2/4/4 f.69v. Unlike Ipolytane, Thomasine exchanged New Year’s gifts with the queen, which may also be an indication that Ipolytane was a child and not expected to give the queen a gift. For Thomasine’s New Year’s gift record, see BL, Egerton MS 3052; Folger, Z.d.16; BL, Additional MS 8159; BL, Lansdowne Roll 17; TNA, C 47/3/40; Folger, Z.d.17; BL, RP 294/II; TNA, C 47/3/41. Unfortunately the New Year’s gift rolls which recorded the gifts the queen and select subjects exchanged with the queen have not survived for every year of Elizabeth’s reign. However, if Thomasine did arrive at court in 1579, she participated in the New Year’s gift exchange every year that she was at court for which there is a surviving roll. The only year I have not been able to verify is 1581, since I was not able to view that extant New Year’s gift roll.
49 This is not to argue that these three women had similar court careers, since Helena Snackenborg’s social status of a foreign and then an English noblewoman would have ensured that she would work in higher social circles than the other two women. However, all three women were able to use their court positions to claim rewards that most people in their social group could not attain, even if those rewards were but sartorial ones. However, Thomasine was able to direct some of the queen’s sartorial beneficence to her sister, TNA, LC 5/35 p.181. This ability to direct rewards from the queen to the privy chamber women themselves and their family and friends is the subject of both this chapter and chapter 2.
duties of the privy chamberers or the process by which they became incorporated into the royal household. The women of the privy chamber did have to take an oath of office, swearing fidelity to the queen, but it was not the Coronation Oath that the senior male Household and chamber staff had to take. Although the text of the oath required of the privy chamber has not survived, letters do refer to these women being sworn into office. Rowland Whyte’s letters are peppered with reports of women being inducted into their offices, such as the letter dated 19 July 1600 which states, “My Lord Shrewsburies 2d Daughter is sworn of the priuy chamber.” When Elizabeth Southwell assumed her place as a maid of honor, Whyte also indicated that she had taken an oath, “The young faire Mrs. Southwell, shall this Day be sworen Mayde of Honor.” In addition to taking their oath, they were often issued livery, or clothing which was considered part of the terms of their employment.

Although a woman may have started her career as a lower ranked chamberer or as a maid of honor, promotion was possible. In the case of Mary Radcliffe, she was promoted from a maid of honor to a gentlewoman of the privy chamber once she was considered too old to continue as a maid of honor. For most women, it was often their marriages that helped them rise in rank in the privy chamber. If they came to court as a maid of honor or a chamberer, and if they married into the aristocracy, their new social status would demand a promotion to either a lady of the privy chamber or an extraordinary lady of the privy chamber. Anne Russell began her court career as a maid of honor, but after her marriage in 1565 to Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, she

50 Merton 26.
51 Whyte to Sidney, 19 July 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 207.
52 Whyte to Sidney, 5 January 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 156.
53 Merton 57-58. I will discuss the issue of livery at greater length in chapter 2.
became an extraordinary lady of the privy chamber.\textsuperscript{54} Frances Newton was initially sworn in as a chamberer, but by her death in 1592 had risen to become a lady of the bedchamber. Her initial (and intermediary) advancement resulted from her 1565 marriage to William Brooke, Lord Cobham, which changed her social status from a gentlewoman to an aristocrat. The queen rarely promoted any woman just based upon faithful service. Instead promotions often occured to accommodate a woman’s new social status.\textsuperscript{55} Some women did marry, but still never rose above the rank of chamberer, like Dorothy Bradbelt-Abington.\textsuperscript{56} However, Abington’s marriage, unlike Lady Cobham’s, did not put her in a higher social status bracket; being married or unmarried did not affect a woman’s rank in the privy chamber as much as their membership in the gentry or the nobility.

As mentioned in the introduction, the female members of the privy chamber served the queen in two distinct ways. There were body servants, the chamberers, who carried out the menial duties associated with taking care of the queen and her bodily needs. Then there were the attendants, women usually of higher social status than the chamberers, who attended the queen, but did not have to perform any of the more menial tasks.\textsuperscript{57} The chamberers helped to dress the queen, and along with the maids of honor, wait on her at meals. All members of the privy chamber were part of her retinue, which accompanied her wherever she went. Even when Elizabeth wished to be in private, she had to have at least one woman with her to act as a chaperone, with the idea that she was protecting both the body of the queen from assassination, and as will be discussed in

\textsuperscript{54} Adams, “Dudley, Ann [née Russell],” \textit{ODNB}, XVII, 64.
\textsuperscript{55} Merton 44.
\textsuperscript{56} Merton 44.
\textsuperscript{57} Merton 5.
chapter three, helping to protect the queen’s reputation for chastity.\textsuperscript{58} Sometimes, Elizabeth would wish to speak with a foreign ambassador in a more private manner, keeping only one or two women around her, but assuring the ambassador that these women only understood English, which meant they could not understand the conversation taking place in a foreign tongue.\textsuperscript{59} A 1559 dispatch from Count Helffenstein, the Hapsburg ambassador sent to discuss marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and the Austrian Hapsburg Archduke Charles, to the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand, reported, “the Queen [Elizabeth] during our walk further told me that if I had any further commission of your Imperial Majesty’s to communicate, I might do it freely then, as the maid of honor on duty did not understand Latin.”\textsuperscript{60} Whether or not the maid of honor did or did not understand Latin is unimportant; the queen needed her presence in order to maintain the proper decorum of a single woman not being alone with a man. The privy chamber women’s constant presence was also required when the queen was ill since it was their duty to nurse her back to health. Even when pregnant, the privy chamber women were required to attend the queen; they were only given time off for their confinement before the birth and the necessary time to recover. The aforementioned example of Lord Cobham complaining that his heavily pregnant wife was expected to ride out and accompany the Swedish princess to London, is one example of how the queen’s body and will came before her women’s health and desires.

\textsuperscript{58} Merton 85, 88, discusses the privy chamber women’s roles as chaperones, but she does not bring up the idea of the women protecting the queen’s reputation.

\textsuperscript{59} Merton 85, demonstrates that this was a practice Elizabeth employed even as a princess, when the Count of Feria wished to speak with her privately, but Elizabeth kept two or three with her, and informed the count they only understood English.

\textsuperscript{60} Count Helffenstein to Emperer Ferdinand, postscript to a latter dated 16 March 1559 in Victor Von Klarwill (ed.), \textit{Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners}, transl. by T.H. Nash (London: John Lane and The Bodley Head Ltd., 1928), 48.
Patronage, Politics, and Players

Although constant service to the queen may have been quite taxing at times, it also provided the privy chamber women with constant access to the queen. Historians have debated whether or not the court women’s privileged status and close proximity to the queen empowered them to be political agents at court. As discussed in the introduction, the privy chamber women had been labeled as apolitical because Elizabeth wanted the privy chamber to serve as a buffer zone between herself and her male counselors, government officials, ambitious male courtiers, and, most importantly, political factions. Other historians have argued that the privy chamber women were political because they connected Elizabeth to networks of subjects, controlled access to the queen, and had constant access to the queen themselves which allowed them to press the suits of their clients and kin. The debate, in part, has revolved around determining what constituted political patronage. The privy chamber women’s patronage has come under a great deal of scrutiny because they were barred from other administrative offices which precluded them from formally being involved in the mechanisms that formulated and implemented foreign and domestic political policies. However, whether or not the patronage the privy chamber women were able to distribute was political has not been agreed upon. For example, Pam Wright acknowledged that the privy chamber women participated in patronage, but did not perceive their patronage activities as connected to the realm of politics. According to Wright, the privy chamber women cultivated being

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62 Wright 172.
politically neutral and only pressed individual suits for an opportunity to collect bribes.\textsuperscript{63} Ultimately, Wright concluded that the privy chamber women were only minor patrons who could either help or hinder a suit, but played only a small role either way.\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, Wright divorced their minor patronage activities from politics, because (according to her) they were motivated for self profit only, instead of sustaining or pushing forward a distinct and sustained political agenda that reflected or challenged the agendas of some of Elizabeth’s leading male officials like Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester or William Cecil, and thereby removing themselves from playing a part in the faction that Wright assumed controlled Elizabethan court politics.\textsuperscript{65}

Wright’s assessment of Elizabethan court women’s patronage is based upon a very narrow definition of what constituted political activity and upon an outdated definition of what constituted political faction at the Elizabethan court. As noted in the introduction, the role of faction at the Elizabethan court has been reassessed and redefined by such scholars as Wallace MacCaffery, Simon Adams, and Paul E.J. Hammer. A new consensus has developed that although competition for favor and rewards was consistently part of court life, faction, in the strictest sense should not be conflated with patronage networks, but rather in the words of Paul E.J. Hammer, faction “was seen as the perversion of the patronage process, not its common manifestation.”\textsuperscript{66}

Simon Adams gives the most succinct definition of “faction”: “a faction was a personal following employed in a direct opposition to another personal following. A faction

\textsuperscript{63} Wright, 161-163, 172. Other historians have maintained this idea that the privy chamber was an apolitical cocoon with politically neutralized female staff, for example, see Adams, “Eliza Enthroned?,” 73-74.
\textsuperscript{64} Wright 172.
\textsuperscript{65} Wright 159, 172.
struggle could involve disputes over patronage or debate over matters of state, but its essence was a personal rivalry that over-rode all other considerations.”

As discussed in the introduction, this strict definition of faction calls for a reassessment of the extent faction played in Elizabethan politics. Instead of faction defining Elizabethan politics, it only manifested itself in the mid to late 1590s. The realization that faction could penetrate politics, but was not in and of itself the deciding factor of who or what was political at the Elizabethan court forces historians to reexamine whether or not Elizabeth’s privy chamber women participated in politics.

Although a stricter definition of faction helps us to better understand the nature of the political, it does not necessarily clarify the connection between patronage and politics. Merton treats the women’s abilities to act as brokers of favor as a political role and a traditional one exercised by the male privy chamber staff of a male monarch; the privy chamber women’s gender did not preclude them from this important political activity. Patronage in Merton’s assessment of the political agency of the privy chamber women was in and of itself connected to politics. Although she does not explicitly state this, Merton appears to be working with Wallace MacCaffrey’s definition of patronage as a political tool wielded by the Crown to reward the political elite for their loyal support of the monarchy. Barbara Harris has also argued that members of the early modern elite understood politics in terms of “increasing their wealth and power by gaining access to the bounty of the crown.”

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had to be at court to vie for the monarch’s favor which transformed the court as the center of politics. Patronage manifested itself in terms of titles of nobility, the orders of chivalry, knighthoods, posts at court and in the household, administrative, military, church, and judicial offices, as well as gifts, exemptions, annuities, monopolies, and land grants. Although the rewards distributed may not have been political in and of themselves, they did serve a larger political purpose of keeping the political elite happy and the government stable. Moreover, the ability to influence the queen in the distribution of these Crown rewards has also been seen as an act of political power.

In terms of the privy chamber women’s ability to directly influence the queen, their effectiveness as patrons has been debated. Some historians undercut the privy chamber women’s political influence in matters of patronage (or politics in general) because they are not seen as acting independently from the queen, but at best “occasionally reflecting outside male influences.” In many ways, the debate over the extent to which Elizabethan female privy chamberers exerted political influence over patronage or any other political issue such as the queen’s marriage, seems to be a dead-end fight over degree as opposed to kind. However, if we work with the idea that patronage, regardless of what was being sought, was a political tool wielded by the crown, then the process of how the Crown could use this tool was a political process and

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71 MacCaffrey 103.
72 Wright, “A change in direction,” 163, takes on the contradictory view that the privy chamber women were inept as political patrons, but that they were still worth politically cultivating. Wright is also unclear as to who in the privy chamber she considered worth cultivating: the male members of the privy chamber or the women privy chamberers. Simon Adams, “Eliza Enthroned?” 74 also separates the female members of the privy chamber’s ability to be patrons from any “independent political involvement on their part.” An opposing view is presented in Merton, “The Women Who Served.” One of Merton’s overarching premises is that these women were politically important because they did influence the queen, often with great success.
the people involved in this process were political players. I would now like to turn to the correspondence of Sir Robert Sidney and his agent at court, Rowland Whyte to analyze the process through which patronage was distributed at court, the currency courtiers needed to trade in to obtain their rewards, and the role the privy chamber women played in the process.

Pressing the queen to grant a suit was a delicate enterprise and rarely a quick one. Although Elizabethan courtiers and government officials as well as modern historians have not always agreed upon the extent to which Elizabethan female privy chamberers successfully influenced the queen’s decisions over the distribution of crown patronage, it is still possible to identify the mechanisms used for patronage transactions. Robert Beale, a clerk of the Privy Council and secretary for his brother-in-law, Francis Walsingham, who sometimes filled in for him as Principal Secretary, wrote a treatise in 1592 about the offices of a councilor and the principal secretary to the queen.74 One of the pieces of advice he bestowed upon his readers concerned how to interact with the men and women of the privy chamber: “Learne before your accesse her Ma[jes]ties disposic[i]on by some in the Privie Chamber w[i]th whom you must keepe creditt, for that will stande you in much steede.”75 This statement reveals two very important components needed by clients and patrons to push through suits: information and “credit.” Credit, according to Beale, was both being held in the esteem of the privy chamber women, who would in turn, and more importantly, build up the individual’s worth in the queen’s eyes.

75 Beale, I, 437.
One of the requirements of operating in a government based upon personal monarchy was learning how to deal with the monarch’s personality. A person needed to know the queen’s mood and remain in her good favor, to have “credit” with her, to obtain a positive response from her over any suit or favor an individual put forth. This was extremely hard to do if not at court, as Sir Robert Sidney discovered when he was posted as Governor of Flushing in the Netherlands in 1589.\textsuperscript{76} Like many non-courtiers or government officers whose positions took them away from the court, Sidney needed to have court contacts who could continue to build his credit with the queen as well as navigate the queen’s temperament to find the propitious moment to put forth his various suits. From the period between 1595 and 1603 while Sidney was in Flushing, he used his court contacts, often his aunts, Katherine (née Dudley) Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon and Anne (née Russell) Dudley, Countess of Warwick to put forth a series of suits including: seeking leave to return home to attend court and see his family, the position of Vice Chamberlain in 1595, the Wardsmanship of the Cinque Ports in 1597, a lease to the crown’s estate of Oatford Park, a title of nobility, and a place on the privy council, among others. As already mentioned, the Countess of Warwick was both a close friend of Elizabeth and an extraordinary gentlewoman of the privy chamber.\textsuperscript{77} The Countess of Huntingdon, on the other hand, did not hold a court position, but by the end of Elizabeth’s reign was also an intimate companion to the queen.\textsuperscript{78} Both women proved to be important links connecting Sidney and his suits to the queen.

\textsuperscript{76} According to Michael G. Brennan, \textit{The Sidneys of Penshurst and the Monarchy, 1500-1700} (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2006), 101, although Sidney was appointed in 1589, he did not take up this post until May 1590.
\textsuperscript{77} Adams, “Dudley [née Russell], Anne,” \textit{ODNB}. XVII, 64.
By examining Sidney’s correspondence which recorded his interactions with his two aunts, other privy chamber women and other female courtiers, it becomes clear that female courtiers and the privy chamber women especially, were important in the ways Beale mentioned in his treatise. Sidney’s aunts often advised him when he should write or whether or not they could personally bring up his requests based upon the queen’s mood, and they often mentioned their attempts to speak well of him to the queen and her response to either their praise of him or his requests. In addition to the roles of building up Sidney’s credit in the eyes of the queen and their advice as to when to press his requests, historians can also see these women working with members of Elizabeth’s government and household to help Sidney. Moreover, the Countess of Warwick and the Countess of Hungtindon met with varied levels of success and seemed to do better in certain areas of patronage than in others.

Indeed in the letters, Sidney’s female contacts often seek male courtiers and counselors for additional support. When Sidney was pushing for a two month leave his agent reported,

My Lady Warwick being by, saies, that she told her Majestie the Desire of your Lordship had to come ouer for 3 Monethes, about a very earnest Occasion in Law, that concerned the Good of your Children; but the Queen sayd, that the Time was too daungerous, and that she cold not beleue you your selfe desired it. And she [Countess of Warwick] bid me [Whyte] goe to my Lord of Essex, who promised her to second it. Your Lordship may iudge of this as you please. My Ladies Determinacion is, to haue it moued by my Lord Treasurer, Lord Admirall, and Sir Robert Cecill, who I hope will be able to effecte it. 79

In this example, although the countess was unsuccessful in getting the queen to grant Sidney’s request for a leave, she had started moving the suit forward. First of all she informed Sidney of the queen’s state of mind on the matter and the first series of

79 Whyte to Sidney, 16 November 1595 in Letters and Memorials, I, 361.
objections he would have to overcome. Secondly, she enlisted the help of some of the major male figures in Elizabeth’s government: Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex who was a privy councilor and a favourite of the queen; Charles Howard, Lord Admiral who was also the husband of one of Elizabeth’s closest friends and cousins and who in her own right was a lady of the bedchamber; William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Lord Treasurer, who was one of Elizabeth’s most trusted servants; and Burghley’s son, Robert Cecil another member of the privy council.

In many ways this passage speaks to both the strengths and the weaknesses of the privy chamber women’s ability to exert influence over the queen. Since they were in constant attendance upon the queen, they often had opportunities to broach the subject of their clients’ suits. Unfortunately, having the queen’s ear did not automatically result in getting her permission. Nonetheless, the privy chamber women were politically aware of who had the proper amount of weight to throw behind the suit to move it to a successful conclusion, and thereby the countess was in an excellent position to direct Sidney’s suits to people who could help her in this matter. Needing more than one patron or contact was not unusual. As Paul E.J. Hammer has pointed out, suitors usually approached as many different patrons as possible to help them in their suits.\textsuperscript{80} The countess helped Sidney move his suit forward by both identifying other patrons for Sidney and acting on his behalf to recruit them to his cause. This ability to recruit the powerful male figures at court to their clients’ causes reveals that the privy chamber women were aware of the politics of the court; they knew who was in favor and who was out.

Nor was the countess alone in having trouble moving Sidney’s suits. In a follow up letter, Whyte informed Sidney that Essex “being at Dinner . . . cald me vnto him, and

\textsuperscript{80} Hammer, “Patronage at Court,” 68.
said, by God I cannot persuade the Queen to giue your Master Leaue to return, though I told her that he was troubled with an Ague.‖

Therefore it was not merely the countess’ gender and her exclusion from participating in more traditional political offices that sometimes blocked her ability to influence the queen. Even councilors and favorites had an uphill battle to fight in getting their notoriously indecisive queen to make changes in her policies or, as will be discussed later, to grant titles of nobility or fill vacant political offices. More importantly, understanding that the patronage system was usually a slow moving machine that required many operators to produce the desired result reveals that the female privy chamberers’ problems within the patronage system were a common predicament shared by both male and female patrons. Although these women may have needed additional help in following up a client’s suit, that is not the same as being completely dependent upon the power of male courtiers to accomplish the things the women could not. Working together was not an automatic sign of lack of political clout. Instead, it reveals that the privy chamber women knew of multiple political channels that could carry their clients’ suits to the queen.

Nor did the women of the privy chamber only enlist men to help them press the suits of their clients, friends, and family. When Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, left court she kept her privy chamber contacts to help her in any future suits she might set before the queen. Although the nature of the suit is not mentioned in this 1575 letter from her brother-in-law, Anthony Wingfield, he makes it clear that the person the countess had originally chosen might not be the best choice to help her. Wingfield showed the Countess of Sussex, a member of the privy chamber, the Countess of Shrewsbury’s letter to a “Mrs Knolles,” probably Elizabeth Knollys and gentlewoman of

81 White to Sidney, 23 November 1595, Letters and Memorials, I, 364.
the privy chamber serving at this time. However, the Countess of Sussex warned Wingfield that Knollys would “be but faint in my l[ady’s] behaulf.”\textsuperscript{82} Instead the Countess of Sussex decided that the Countess of Shrewsbury should write to Mr. Secretary Walsingham, who if he says he will work on Shrewsbury’s behalf “wyll do ytt in Dede.” Lastly, the Countess of Sussex directed that the Countess of Shrewsbury should also “wrytt onto mrs Blanche Aparye, Mrs Skidmore and Mres abbyngtone [all women who were serving in the privy chamber] and these wyll Do more for my l[ady] than Mrs knoll.”\textsuperscript{83} In March of 1600, Sidney once again was seeking leave from his post in Flushing, and his wife asked Robert Cecil for help. In turn, Cecil “very honourably told her, that he wold most willingly moue your Leue to return, and desired her to send to some others in Court to assist him, which she promised to doe, and I shal goe to the Court to my Lord Nottingham, and my Lady Warwicke.”\textsuperscript{84} These examples demonstrate that often the privy chamber women worked alongside male government officials to help their friends and clients. However, the Countess of Shrewbury’s letter also indicates that some women had either more clout than others, or that not every woman would work on every suit to their utmost. It is not clear why Mrs Knollys would only offer “faint” help to the Countess of Shrewsbury. Possibly Mrs Knollys did not have the same power over Elizabeth that women who had served longer may have accomplished, like Blanche Parry who had been with Elizabeth since the queen’s infancy. Or, it is possible that whatever suit the countess wanted to press conflicted with Mrs. Knollys’ interests, and therefore, the latter would not throw her full weight behind the suit. However, just as the Countess of Warwick directed Sidney to male court officers, the Countess of Sussex also suggested

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\item \textsuperscript{82} Folger, X.d.428 (128).
\item \textsuperscript{83} Folger, X.d. 428 (128).
\item \textsuperscript{84} Whyte to Sidney, 15 March 1600, in \textit{Letters and Memorials}, II, 179.
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to the Countess of Shrewsbury that she should enlist Francis Walsingham in addition to
certain women in the privy chamber. Therefore, men and women alike sought the help of
privy chamber women to help them in their suits, not only because of the direct access
the privy chamber women had to the queen, but also because these women had access to
other members of the court and government who had the ability to influence the queen.

Sidney often had multiple privy chamber women working on his behalf. Both of
his aunts, the Countess of Warwick and the Countess of Huntingdon assisted him in his
suits. He also approached another privy chamber woman, Lady Scudamore, to help him
in his pursuit of the office of the Wardenship of the Cinque Ports. Whyte recorded
Scudamore’s involvement:

Vpon Sonday in the After Noone my Lady Skudmore, gott the Queen to reade
your Letter, who asked of her, how yt came into her Hands; she answered, that my
Lady Sidney desired her to deliuer yt to her Majestie, from her Husband. Doe you
not know the Contents of yt, sayd the Queen; no Madam sayd she. When her
Majesty said, here is much adoe about the Cinq Portes. I demanded of my Lady
Skudamore, what she observed in her Majestie, while she was a Reading of yt;
who sayd, that she read yt all ouer, with two or 3 Pughs.  

Here Lady Scudamore plays the same role on Sidney’s behalf that the Countess of
Warwick had done. Scudamore delivered Sidney’s letter (which came to Scudamore’s
hands through Sidney’s wife) to the queen and then relayed the queen’s reaction.
Elizabeth’s “two or 3 Pughs” apparently signaled her displeasure as she said nothing
positive about Sidney or his request, which the queen sometimes did when someone
spoke on Sidney’s behalf. In addition to Lady Scudamore, Sidney had both of his aunts,
the Countess of Warwick and the Countess of Huntingdon, press his requests. At one
point, Sidney had three suits open at once—a request to take leave from his post in the
Netherlands, a bid for a land grant, and a suit for a title of nobility—and had all of his

85 Whyte to Sidney, 22 March 1599, in Memorials and Letters, II, 97.
court contacts male and female working on his behalf. Moreover, Sidney often relied on
his wife’s help to urge his court contacts forward with his suits. When Sidney and his
wife sought a lease from one of the queen’s lands, Oatford Park, Lady Sidney was
“resolved to proceed in her Sute, by my Lady Huntingdons, My Lady Warwicks, and Mr.
Secretaries Help.” Sidney’s wife played an important part in maintaining their family’s
relationship with both Robert Sidney’s aunts and other courtiers who worked on the
Sidneys’ behalf. In November 1599, the Sidneys were once again petitioning the queen to
grant Sidney leave. Despite being heavily pregnant she, “with her great Belly, ventured to
goe to Court this Day, where she mett with my Lady Huntingdon, my Lady Warwick, my
Lord and Lady Nottingham. They doe all assure her, that they will deale very earnestly
with the Queen for your Return.” Six days after making her requests she gave birth.
Therefore, Sidney depended upon his female relatives to help him in a number of ways
while he was away from court. He relied upon his aunts to press his suits at court as well
to strategize about whom else he should enlist to his cause, and he also depended upon
his wife to go to court and stoke the fires under his patrons to keep his suits alive.

Many clients became increasingly frustrated if they felt their privy chamber
women patrons were not using their time with the queen to push their suits. In 1598,
Rowland Whyte was becoming increasingly distressed with what he viewed as a lack of
progress on his employer’s request for the queen to once again grant Sidney leave.

Although both the Countess of Warwick and the Countess of Huntingdon took turns

86 Whyte to Sidney, 21 February 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 168.
87 Whyte to Sidney, 11 March 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 178.
88 Whyte to Sidney, 23 November 1599, in Letters and Memorials, II, 143.
89 Nor was this the first time that a heavily pregnant Barbara Sidney found herself going to court to
petition the queen and her court contacts to work on getting her husband’s leave granted. In 1595 she was
also pregnant when she went to court and visited with the Countess of Warwick, Lady Mary Scudamore,
and the Countess of Hertford, which according to Whyte gave the Sidneys’ suite “new Liffe,” Whyte to
championing their nephew’s suit, the Countess of Huntingdon in Whyte’s opinion was not using her close friendship with the queen as well as she should in the matter. On 1 February 1598, Whyte complained to his employer, “My Lady Huntingdon is at Court, and with her Majestie very priuat twice a Day. I cannot see what good she doth for her Frends . . . She Protests that she doth remember you, and will.” In this example the countess is a very valuable “Frend” to have at court since she spends so much time with the queen; and more importantly, she has the queen all to herself. Evidently, Whyte believed that the countess was not using these advantages to Sidney’s advantage!

However, Sidney and Whyte were not alone in their frustration over the way court women did (or did not) press the queen to reward their client’s request. Lady Mary Scudamore’s cousin, George Boleyn, dean of Litchfield, was dubious about the amount of help she could offer the Earl of Shrewsbury, who had apparently sought Scudamore’s help. Boleyn informed the earl that,

I am afraid that your lordship is not likely to hear in haste from my cousin Scudamore . . . She is one that is wont to delay more than needs and loseth many a tide for the taking, though she must watch for her tide if she will speed her business . . . as far as my cousin Scudamore there is no sure confidence in her. But her speech is fair and smooth as a reed, so I do beseech your honour to take this as a watchword spoken under benedicte.

Once again a female courtier is criticized for moving slowly and missing out on opportunities to press their clients’ suit. Unlike Whyte, who was regularly at court, it is not clear how familiar Boleyn was with the workings of the court. It often took months to get the queen to agree to a grant of leave for Sidney or decades to grant a title of nobility to someone. One of the most powerful men at the Elizabethan court, Robert Dudley, Earl

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90 Whyte to Sidney, 1 February 1598 in Letters and Memorials, II, 87.
91 Lambeth Palace Library, Shrewsbury MSS 707, f.221 as quoted in Wright 161. According to Aaron Hope, Assistant Archivist at the Lambeth Palace Library, e-mail message to author, August 7, 2007, this letter is dated 21 December 1593.
of Leicester had to wade through nine years of excuses from the queen before he was finally allowed to lead a military expedition in the Netherlands against Spain.\textsuperscript{92} And just as Elizabeth wavered back and forth between granting Sidney’s repeated requests for leave, Elizabeth wavered and changed her orders about what Leicester could and could not do in the Netherlands. Part of the challenge of getting a request granted or a policy implemented was the difficulty in navigating Elizabeth’s personality and knowing the queen’s mind. Nor was it just the queen’s mind that always changed, but the state of domestic and international affairs was also in a constant state of flux. Although Elizabeth was able to maintain her throne and quash two minor rebellions, France buried three kings and was torn apart by the wars of religion; the European political landscape was constantly changing, and Elizabeth, her court, and her government had to be able to change with it. Therefore, although it might have appeared that the court women were wasting time with the queen and not using these moments to influence the queen to favor their client, they, being alone with the queen, may have realized that the tide had rolled out and this was not the right time to press a suit.

Moreover, although Whyte and Boleyn were disgruntled with their female courtiers’ use of their time with the queen, they were still very dependent upon them. As Whyte reported to Sidney, “My Lady Huntingdon is at Court; I do daily press her to moue her Majestie for your Leaue . . . she promises to do yt, and she may yet doe yt, for her Access is good, and she is very gracious with her Majestie.”\textsuperscript{93} The term “gracious” could mean one of two things, either the countess was in favor with her majesty, or she spoke in a way that the queen found pleasing. Whether it was the countess’ speech that

\textsuperscript{92} Haigh 135.
\textsuperscript{93} Whyte to Sidney, 14 January 1598, in \textit{Letters and Memorials}, II, 81.
pleased the queen or that Elizabeth held the countess in favor is unclear, but either of these definitions reveals the reasons why she would be good patrons. Therefore, the very thing that drove men like Whyte, Sidney, and Boleyn crazy was the very thing that made these women so valuable: their ability to have constant access to the queen and their ability to employ a “gracious” manner and “smooth” speech with the queen, which Elizabeth found pleasing, made them excellent spokeswomen for their clients. However, part of the privy women’s success in handling the queen was knowing when to press her and when to leave the subject alone. Therefore, although the slow pace of moving a suit forward frustrated many clients, they still had to trust that their female patrons were in fact working on their behalf.

Their constant attendance upon the queen also allowed female privy chamberers to act quickly if a situation arose that presented their clients with a chance to get their suit granted. One of Sidney’s crusades for a grant of leave from Flushing coincided with the 1595 death of his uncle, the Earl of Huntingdon. The queen was very concerned over how his countess, her close friend, would take the news. Consequently, Elizabeth forbade anyone else to break the news to the countess so that she would be able to do it in person. Whyte quickly seized the moment and went to the Countess of Warwick and Mr. Stanhope, another government official, to tell them to beseech the queen to grant Sidney leave so that he could comfort his “disconsolate aunt.” Both Warwick and Stanhope agreed with Whyte’s assessment of the situation and “my Lady Warwick broke yt to the Queen; my Lady Hoby, and Mr Stanhope being by. Who [the queen] then sayd, She had rather than [£] 100l. you were here, for none so fit as your self to looke vnto her.”

Therefore, although Sidney was away from the court, his contacts there, especially the

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94 Whyte to Sidney, 19 December 1595, in Letters and Memorials, I, 380.
Countess of Warwick, were able to turn this specific episode to Sidney’s favor. Had the
Countess of Warwick not been on hand when the Earl of Huntingdon had died, Sidney
may not have been able to manipulate the situation to his advantage. Also, Sidney got his
permission for leave, because of his personal relationship with his other aunt, the
Countess of Huntingdon. The queen who cared very much about her female companion
was willing to overcome her gravest concerns about Sidney leaving his post to ensure that
her dear friend had all the comfort she required.

On another occasion, while Sidney was away in Flushing, he desperately sought
to be granted a lease or a fee of Oatford Park, one of the Crown’s lands. Once again,
Sidney could not press his suit in person, but relied heavily upon his male and female
court contacts. Sidney became increasingly worried when one of his main rivals for the
park, Henry Brooke, eleventh Lord Cobham, was going to host the queen during the
wedding festivities of one of Elizabeth’s maids of honor. This prompted Whyte to report
to Sidney,

The Feare I haue of 400 [Lord Cobham] might take this Oportunity of 1500
[Queen] going to his Howse, made me beseech cc [Countess of Warwick] to haue
of an Ey vnto Oteford, and to continue an honorable Care towards you, that no
Prejudice may be donne unto you, which is faithfully promised.95

Whether Cobham made a play for the royal park is not recorded, but evidently the
countess kept her promise, since Sidney [and Cobham] was still lobbying for it the next
month.96 Therefore, although Sidney was away from court, his contacts, especially his
female ones, who constantly attended the queen could act on his behalf. Whenever a

95 Whyte to Sidney, 14 June 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 202. It should be noted that often
“cc” stood for the Countess of Huntingdon in other letters. I am not sure if Collins made a mistake. The
Countess of Warwick was certainly at the wedding since it was not only two courtiers getting married, but
the bride, a maid of honor, was also one of her relatives.
96 Whyte to Sidney, 12 July 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 206.
development occurred in a client’s suit, female courtiers were in an excellent position to either seize it for the client’s advantage, or at least ensure that his interests were protected.

There were also occasions when some female courtiers did not feel it was their place to push forward a suit. When Sir Robert Sidney tried to obtain the office of the Wardenship of the Cinque Ports, he originally enlisted the help of the Earl of Essex. Later the Countess of Warwick made it known to Sidney that she “moued my Lord of Essex for you,” but she added that Sidney should write directly to the queen and if he could find no one else to deliver the letter the countess would “take [it at] a Time the Queen may read it.” Despite the countess’ offer to help, Whyte warned Sidney that his aunt was “fearfull to haue it as much knowen she speaks to any for you in this Sute.” It is not clear why the Countess of Warwick did not want others to know she was brokering her nephew’s suit, but it is possible that for such an important post, she did not want to be seen putting her own (or her family’s) interest above the male government officials with whom she might need to work with later. Although the countess may have been hesitant to push Sidney’s suit, she did pass on valuable information to him. In addition to advising him on how to approach the queen, she also warned him that although the Earl of Essex felt confident that with his support Sidney would be granted the Wardenship, the countess was of the opposite opinion, believing “it desperate, and that if she can iudge of any Thinge, Lord Cobham [Sidney’s main rival for the position] shall haue it.”

This was not the only time the Countess of Warwick felt unable to help Sidney by directly presenting his request to the queen but found other ways to help him. In 1599 when Sidney sought the position of the Lord President of Wales, his aunt told Whyte “that she wold find some

97 Whyte to Sidney, 16 March 1597 in Letters and Memorials, II, 30.
Meanes or other to feele her Majesties Disposicion, but I shuld doe well to get some Man of Greatnes and Authority to doe it, and wished me to goe to my Lord Admirall.” Once again the countess did not feel she was the appropriate channel through which to push the suit for an important government office, but she would help to pave the way for that “Man of Greatnes and Authority” to influence the queen in Sidney’s favor. By learning the queen’s feelings on this matter, the countess would be able to either advise Sidney on how to go about his suit or to drop it altogether.

Moreover, she also directed Sidney’s attention, as the countess had done on other occasions to whomever the countess believed was that great man right for the job. However, the countess and her fellow female courtiers would only know whom to choose if they kept abreast of the court politics and kept track of who was in and who was out of royal favor. Although they did not seem to weigh into the factional strife that overwhelmed the court and government in the mid 1590s, this does not render them apolitical as much as politically adept and able to work with whomever served them and their clients best. The Countess of Warwick, for example, had worked with Essex along with the Cecils, father and son, Essex’s chief rivals, from 1595 onwards and never appeared to have to choose between them. Only once in 1597 did the Countess of Warwick and the Earl of Essex believe they would have a better chance winning Elizabeth’s approval for one of Sidney’s pleas for a leave of absence from his post if they waited to present it after Sir Robert Cecil left court. However, the bulk of the correspondence presents the privy chamber women as not having to take sides in the

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98 Whyte to Sidney, 12 September 1599 in *Letters and Memorials*, II, 122.
99 Whyte to Sidney, 25 January 1598, in *Letters and Memorials*, II, 85. Interestingly Whyte reports that the countess first suggested that Sidney wait until Cecil left to present his suit to the queen. Essex reportedly held the same opinion as the countess.
factional struggle that briefly appeared at the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Nonetheless, they still had to be politically aware of their surroundings in order to continue in their roles as patron.

Being at the center of politics not only allowed the privy chamber women to enlist the strongest allies to their clients’ case, but they could also pass on other important pieces of information to their clients, courtiers, and government officials. The role of news and information in court politics is still something historians are working to more fully understand, especially in terms of the way women collected and circulated news. As Charlotte Merton posited, “Information was the key to a successful political life.”

As seen in the correspondence of Robert Sidney, knowing the queen’s moods and who was the right person to move one’s suit were critical to successfully resolving one’s suit. However, as Natalie Mears and James Daybell have reminded scholars, news’ political import was not confined to matters of patronage, and women used news in the same way men did. According to Mears, using the privy chamber women to assess the queen’s mood or her “disposition” on a matter was not just standard operating procedure to win a title of nobility, but also crucial to policy making. Moreover, gender did not devalue

\[\text{Merton 171.}\]

\[\text{Natalie Mears discusses the centrality of news in court politics in “Politics in the Elizabethan privy Chamber: Lady Mary Sidney and Kat Ashley,” in James Daybell (ed.), }\]


\[\text{Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68-70,}\]

\[\text{107-114, 119-134, 142-144. It should be noted that Mears downplays the contribution of Merton in order to highlight her contributions to the reassessment of the role of the privy chamber women in Elizabethan politics. James Daybell in ”Suche newes as on the Quenes hye wayes we have mett”: the News and Intelligence Networks of Elizabeth Talbot, countess of Shrewsbury (c.1527-1608),” in James Daybell (ed.),}\]

\[\text{Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700 (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), 114-131,}\]

\[\text{argues that women were both the source for news and the consumers of news, both patterns following that of their male counterparts. Daybell also argues that ideas about gender did not divide information along the lines of male/information and female/gossip, trivial nor male/public and female/domestic. Mears,}\]

\[\text{Queenship, 112 also cautions scholars to not trivialize “gossip” about marriages, the queen’s health, and who was in favor at court.}\]

\[\text{Mears, “Politics,” 76, 77.}\]
certain types of information in the eyes of early modern contemporaries as it does today. The line between information and the pejorative term of gossip was not as clearly or deeply drawn in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in part, because the lines were also blurred between what constituted personal business and political business. As will be discussed in chapter two, relating ideas or reactions to gifts was not a personal matter, if winning the queen’s favor was at stake. Discussing court marriages, births, christenings and death was also a discussion of the building and maintaining of social, political, and economic ties of patronage. Thus, letters from both men and women to other men and women included a mixture of information about sessions of Parliament alongside rumors of courtiers’ sexual affairs. And, women, such as the Countess of Warwick, were valuable sources of news and information that would help Sidney in his quests for juicier and more appetizing morsels of royal bounty. The news the privy chamber women relayed back to their clients about their suits also shows that the privy chamber women were aware of the larger political issues that were dictating other aspects of court life and governmental policies. One of the reasons Sidney was finding it difficult to get the queen to grant him his leave in March of 1600 was that the situation with Spain, which had a direct impact upon peace in the Netherlands, was unsettled. According to Whyte, “And for your Leave, my Lady Warwick begins to fear it will not be till this Peace be brought to some End or other.” When Whyte went to some of the male government officials to see if there was anything

103 Again there is a connection between court sexual scandals and court politics. For example, Rowland Whyte in a letter dated 11 February 1598 was prompted to write to Sidney about the rumor of the Earl of Essex having rekindled his adulterous affair with one of the queen’s maids of honor: “I know you will be sorry to hear, what grieues me to wryte of: Yt is spied out . . . that 1000 [Essex], is againe fallen in Loue with his fairest B. Yt cannot but come to 1500 [the queen’s] Ears; then he is vndone, and all they that depend vpon his Faour,” in Letters and Memorials, II, 90.
that could be done they echoed the countess’ explanation: “I moved Mr. Secretary and my Lord Admiral in it, they say that they dare not trouble the Queen as long as the Peace stands vpon vncertain Termes.” Therefore, although the Countess of Warwick was pressing a personal suit, a man’s temporary leave of office, she still needed to be politically savvy to know why her client’s suit might not be successful at any given moment.

Even though the privy chamber women were sometimes limited in their ability to directly champion a suit, they were still considered useful allies in the quest for royal bounty. The same letter in which Whyte told Sidney that the Earl of Essex had also met with defeat, reveals why Sidney felt he could turn to the countess for help and how the countess would act on Sidney’s behalf:

I found my Lady Warwick at Leisure, she read your Lettre . . . I protested vnto her, that your Lordship, before you euer stirrd in it, tooke so good Aduise as possibly you cold get, and being by them assured of your Title, you were willing to giue it [Sidney’s suit] Liffe; and as far as I cold perceaue by you, you were not minded to proceed in it, till her Honor, by her own Cownsell, might haue Time to know and consider your Right; she resolued, that if it were yours she was farr from hindring any Good vnto you, but most ready in her self, to make the World know how much you were esteemed of her for your own Worth, and nearness of Kin to her late Lord; and when this Matter between her and the Queen were ended, your Lordship shuld see her Care of you.

According to this conversation between Whyte and the Countess of Warwick, Sidney before he first set forth his suit had asked for advice about how to go about this business. In turn, Sidney had been advised to seek out the Countess because of her “title.” It is not clear if the “title” was her noble title of “countess” or her title of extraordinary lady of the privy chamber. However, her title had the ability to give Sidney’s suit “Liffe” if the countess was willing to back it. If “title” refers to her privy chamber position, we can see

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104 Whyte to Sidney, 16 March 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 180.
105 Whyte to Sidney, 23 November 1595, in Letters and Memorials, I, 364.
why she had the power to help her nephew’s suit. As already discussed, by being at court she had direct access to both the queen and her male councilors. The Countess of Warwick was in the center of news and information and would know whom she should ask to help her push forward Sidney’s suit as well as the best time to approach the queen. Sidney (through Whyte) acknowledged his aunt’s privileged position by stating that he would not further push his request until the countess had decided to go about the matter.

In reply, the countess stated her intention to help Sidney in his suit both because he was a relative of her husband (Sidney was the late Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick’s nephew) and because she held her nephew in great esteem. As Barbara Harris has demonstrated, women often used their role as patron to help their natal and marital families.\(^\text{106}\) The Countess of Rutland wrote to her cousin, Mary Radcliffe (presumably, the one introduced at the beginning of this chapter) to “entreat you therefore to ask the Queen to allow my daughter to visit me.”\(^\text{107}\) The Countess of Rutland justified her request on the grounds that she was very sick, and she had not seen her daughter, Bridget, who was serving as a maid of honor, for five years. Apparently, Radcliffe and anyone else who may have taken up the countess’ suit were successful in getting Bridget Manners leave to return home. Much to the queen’s ire, the countess had been working under false pretenses and had engineered her daughter’s leave so that she could marry without having to try to secure the queen’s approval for the match. Just as in the case of the 1574 Scudamore-Shelton marriage, after an initial round of punishments and chastisement, the


\(^\text{107}\) Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland to her cousin, Mrs. Mary Ratcliffe, 18 July 1594 in HMC Rutland, I, 321.
queen made her peace with the marriage. Although it is undocumented, it is very possible that Mary Radcliffe worked once again on her cousin’s behalf to smooth over the ruffled relationship between the Countess of Rutland, her daughter, and the queen. As both the Rutland and Sidney case attest, family relationships were often grafted upon patron-client networks and vice-versa.

Lastly, the countess makes it clear that this would be a matter that she would take to the queen herself, even though she told Whyte this after she sought the help of Essex, the Cecils, and the Lord Admiral. Therefore, even though she had sought help in this matter, that was not the same thing as relinquishing control over the suit. More importantly, the countess was going to broadcast his worth to the “World,” which surely referred to the queen and the other men the countess had solicited to help her. This “esteem” and “worth,” or in the words of Beale, “credit” was the currency which the countess needed to build up and trade upon to get her client’s leave granted. Since the key to gaining rewards from the queen was to earn her favor, which could be done by building up one’s credit with the queen, the Countess of Warwick was going to win Sidney the queen’s favor by promoting him as a candidate worthy of such an honor.

Whyte repeatedly relates in his letters to Sidney that the countess and his other court contacts were speaking well of him to the queen. In a letter dated 3 October 1599, Whyte reminded Sidney that “your Lordship is much beholding vnto her [Countess of Warwick], for I neuer knew a Lady more carefull of your Good or your Preferment, then she is.”

Sometimes this took the specific form of assuring the queen that Sidney always put his service to the queen before the needs of his own family. When the Countess of Warwick tried to convince the queen to grant Sidney leave from his post in Flushing on the

108 Whyte to Sidney, in Letters and Memorial, II, 130.
grounds that he had important legal business to take care of, the countess “assured her [the queen], that if there were any Occasion of her Servic to call you [Sidney] away, you would prefer it before your privat Busines, and return, leauinge it vndone.” However, as discussed above, it was private business that eventually did lead the queen to grant his leave so that he could help his recently widowed aunt, the Countess of Huntingdon.

Nonetheless, the Countess of Warwick tried to build Sidney up in the eyes of the queen as a faithful servant who out of his own sense of duty put his queen first before all else. Extolling Sidney’s “Worth” and his sense of duty were just some examples of the “good Speeches” a patron could expend on his or her client’s behalf.

The Countess of Warwick was not the only privy chamber woman to wield this political tool of speaking well of one’s client to build up his/her credit with the queen. The Earl of Rutland who was serving as Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire, away from court, was informed that Mrs Ratcliffe, presumably the Lady Ratcliffe whose father jokingly gave to the queen in 1560, had been working on the earl’s behalf. Although the exact matter is unclear, Rutland’s agent at court, Thomas Screven reported, “You are so much beholden to Mrs. Ratcliffe; she daily doth good offices for you.”

Although Screven uses the phrase “good offices,” the best way she could help the earl was to say something positive on a regular basis about him to either the queen or other courtiers and government officials who also had the ear of the queen. Men also could praise a suitor to the queen to strengthen the supplicant’s standing with the queen. When Sidney got his leave granted in December of 1595 to come home and take care of his aunt, Whyte informed him that “Your Lordship is beholding to my Lord Admirall . . . for his good

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109 Whyte to Sidney, 8 December 1595, in Letters and Memorial, I, 375.
110 Thomas Screven to the Earl of Rutland, 7 December 1587 in HMC Rutland, I, 232.
Speeches of you to the Queen . . . Soe are you to My Lady Warwick, Mr. Stanhope, and Sir Robert Cecil.”

Therefore, one of the most important forms of political currency someone had a court was their “credit” or a reputation of loyalty with the queen which would win for them her favor and the rewards that (theoretically) came with it.

In addition to building up a client’s reputation through praise, a patron also had to safeguard their reputation from slanderous rumors and allegations. When a courtier was not at court it was harder for him (or her) to monitor what other people thought of or said about him (her). Whyte, in one of his letters to his employer, speaks to the vulnerable position Sidney was in by being away from court: “you have already felt the Power of your Advisaries, who wilbe glad of any Occasion, or Accident to keape you away.”

While away from court, Sidney found himself in a catch-22: being away from the court made it harder for him to compete for royal favor such as receiving a grant of leave, but it was the queen herself who denied him the opportunity to come to court. Subsequently, any of Sidney’s rivals would do whatever they could to convince the queen to not grant his leave. Many of Sidney’s friends perceived that his major weakness when vying for court offices, government positions and land grants was his absence from court.

According to the Countess of Huntingdon, although she would “put the Queen in Mind of you” she did not think it would be useful “for so many others looked for it that were present, and had great Credit, and great Frends with the Queen.” This comment makes painfully clear that “great friends” and a good reputation were often not enough to affect a successful solution to a subject’s suit.

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111 Whyte to Sidney, 19 December 1595, in *Letters and Memorial*, I, 381.
112 Whyte to Sidney, 10 March 1598, in *Letters and Memorial*, II, 95.
113 Whyte to Sidney, in *Letters and Memorial*, II, 158, it is not clear which of Sidney’s suits is being discussed.
Moreover, while absent from court individuals were unable to defend themselves from any slander which devalued their credit with the queen. A client expected his patrons not only to bolster his reputation, but to protect it. For example in a letter dated 16 March 1597, Whyte reassured Sidney that, “to giue you Satisfaction, it was my Lady Warwicke, and Sir Edward Dier, that in their Love to you, did with your Enemies had that only Way to hurt you in her Majesty’s favor.” According to Whyte, the only way Sidney’s enemies could hurt him was by attacking his reputation by undermining how he stood in the queen’s eyes. However, Sidney would not have to worry since his court contacts, including the Countess of Warwick, had the queen’s ear, and would not allow any negative comments to settle in the queen’s mind. Sometimes Sidney’s court contacts had to personally disabuse the queen of any wrongdoing he was accused of while in office. At one point, the queen remarked that it was her understanding that Sidney was reaping quite a profit while serving at Flushing. In addition to telling the queen that it was impossible that Sidney was making any money because of “the Deernes of all Things in those Partes,” the countess “humbly besought her Majestie to have you in Remembrance, who vsed as good and as gracious Speeches of you, as she cold doe of any Body.” Therefore, Sidney relied upon his court contacts, particularly his female privy chamber contacts, to help him weather the storms of the queen’s displeasure and to control the damage that could be done to his reputation and his portion of accrued royal favor.

It is important to realize that the female courtiers’ ability to act as the eyes and ears for their clients served a dual purpose; it also allowed them to act as the queen’s mouthpiece. Just as the Countess of Warwick was able to defend Sidney from the queen’s personal contacts, the Countess of Warwick is also able to act as the queen’s mouthpiece.

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115 Whyte to Sidney, in *Letters and Memorial*, II, 36.
accusation of self profit (and possibly of corruption), Elizabeth was using the countess to relate her concerns about Sidney’s service. On another occasion, the queen used the time she shared with the Countess of Warwick while riding in a coach together to criticize how Sidney had conducted himself in a particular episode while at Flushing. The queen was not simply making small talk; through the countess the queen would voice her concerns and chastise Sidney for any mistakes she felt he had made. Perhaps Elizabeth by using these more informal channels to broadcast her concern or displeasure over a royal servant lessened the blow of a royal reprimand. In a sense, the queen was able to use her privy chamber women to send a warning to officers or courtiers she saw performing below her standards. Regardless, Elizabeth did not only use her court women to relay negative messages back to their clients. More often than not, court women informed their clients about the queen’s pleasure with them. In September of 1600, it appeared that Sidney was finally going to get his latest petition for a leave granted, and according to the Countess of Warwick, “that with in these xx Dayes, your Leaue wilbe obtained, and sent vnto you; that her Majestie hath a singular good Opinion of your Deserts and Sufficiency, and often speaks of it vnto her.” Sometimes the queen explicitly used her privy chamber women to inform their clients of her response to their suit. For example, Whyte reported to Sidney in a letter dated 22 March 1600, that the Countess of Warwick “doth attend the Queens Answer to your Lettre, who promises to dictate vnto her Ladyship,

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116 Whyte to Sidney, 26 July 1600, in Letters and Memorial, II, 207.
117 Whyte to Sidney, 26 September 1600, in Letters and Memorial, II, 216.
what her Plasvre is vnto you.”\textsuperscript{118} Therefore, the queen was able to use her privy chamber women to communicate with people away from court\textsuperscript{119}.

The letters exchanged between Sir Robert Sidney and his employee, Rowland Whyte, from 1595 to 1603 reveal a great deal about the quest for royal patronage. It becomes clear that the quest for a single suit was often slow going and involved many people working on a single client’s behalf. Unfortunately, the conclusions we can draw about the power of female courtiers and of female members of the privy chamber in particular are mixed. The women who worked on Sidney’s behalf never worked alone. Even though they regularly attended the queen, often in private, the privy chamber women always insisted on soliciting male courtiers to help them in their suits. Although this could be construed as evidence of the political insignificance of these women, that is too simplistic a conclusion. In spite of not having enough political clout of their own to sway the queen, their position in the center of court politics allowed them to know whom to solicit on behalf of their clients. Therefore, the privy chamber women were politically valuable patrons because of their access both to the queen and her male government officials and favorites. Elizabethan female courtiers’ gender did not strip them of political power and importance, but rather directed how court women would be able to exercise it.

The Sidney letters also attest that these women were still seen as wielding a critical amount of influence over the queen. As Rowland Whyte once reported to Sidney, “My Lady Huntingdon I hope will be myndfull of you, for she governs the Queen, many

\textsuperscript{118} Whyte to Sidney, in \textit{Letters and Memorial}, II, 181. There are other examples where the queen either in an official capacity or in an informal manner uses her female courtiers to communicate with those seeking Elizabeth’s royal favor, see \textit{Letters and Memorial}, II, 41, 181, 192 for just a few other examples.

\textsuperscript{119} Merton 172; Mears, “Politics,” 74.
Elizabeth’s female attendants were considered important people to cultivate at court because of their access to the queen and their perceived ability to have some influence over her. However, more work needs to be done to see if the privy chamber women did have a harder time convincing the queen to reward their clients. The Sidney letters are unusual in their detail about court life, but typical in that more of these types of sources exist for the latter end of Elizabeth’s reign than the earlier. However, it was in the latter end of the reign that many younger courtiers, the generation of Robert Sidney, felt that the queen expected a great deal of service for little or no reward. Sidney was far from being the only ambitious courtier stymied at every turn for a higher government position, a place on the Privy Council, or a grant of a title of nobility. It might be unfair to take the criticism of a George Boleyn, who characterized his cousin, Lady Scudamore, as an inept patron at best, without comparing her success alongside male patrons. As seen with Sidney’s various suits, he did not meet with great success in any of his bids for offices and titles, but he was more often working with some of the most important and powerful members of Elizabeth’s government: William and Robert Cecil, the Earl of Essex, and the Earl of Nottingham (Lord Admiral) to name but a few. Their inability to help Sidney has never caused historians to view them as apolitical or weak patrons.

120 Whyte to Sidney, 12 July 1600 in Letters and Memorials, II, 206.
122 Peck 92-98.
123 Wright 161, 172 seems to take the position that these women were political lightweights, but even that little bit of influence was worth cultivating.
124 The only possible exception is the Earl of Essex. According to Hammer in his biography on Essex, The Polarization of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Essex was seen as a political lightweight, and it has been mainly Hammer who was worked on better understanding Essex’s role in politics.
Even more importantly, some scholars have viewed the privy chamber women as apolitical or weak political players because of their lack of “independent initiative.” They have claimed that the privy chamber women could only act as extensions of the queen, an act that is not seen as a politically viable one.\textsuperscript{125} Although other scholars like Merton and Mears have tried to demonstrate that the court women, through the dissemination of news and the purveying of individual suits, did act independently of the queen, these arguments are not particularly well supported, but even more importantly, they misunderstand a fundamental aspect of Elizabethan privy chamber women’s political power.\textsuperscript{126} Whereas Wright saw the privy chamber’s women acting as an extension of the queen as sign of political neutrality, Mears realized that the role in fact was politically significant. Even though the queen’s privy chamber women were barred from the formal institutionalized seats of power—privy council, Parliament, and other administrative and government positions—the Elizabethan Privy Chamber still retained the political significance it acquired under Henry VIII in that it was a representative of the monarch.\textsuperscript{127} Mears simply falls short in unpacking the larger ramifications of the privy chamber women’s ability to

\textsuperscript{125} Wright 168, 172.

\textsuperscript{126} Merton 172-173, argues that “The women of the privy chamber were not passive instruments. On their own initiative they frequently disclosed privileged information, usually without the queen’s permission.” However, not asking the queen’s permission to pass on any expressions of the queen’s pleasure or displeasure as a firm sign of independent political action, especially since it seems the queen expected her views to be passed on through oral and written communications. Mears, “Politics,” 69-74, tries to rehabilitate the 1562 incident when two privy chamber women, Kat Ashley and Dorothy Broadbelte wrote to the King of Sweden to press his son’s suit for Elizabeth’s hand in marriage. Mears believed that by showing the other members involved and punished in this incident were Ashley’s servants working on her behalf as opposed to Ashley working for them acts as evidence “of the involvement of Privy Chamber women in diplomatic relations and policy making,” 72, is problematic at best, because Elizabeth’s response to this incident, house arrest for the two privy chamber women, is usually cited by scholars as Elizabeth’s refusal to allow her privy chamber women to act on the queen’s behalf without her permission. Even Mears, “Politics,” 72, is forced to admit that although this incident is not unique, the other examples are “fragmentary and scattered.”

\textsuperscript{127} The first to identify that the intimacy of serving the monarch’s bodily needs endowed the privy chamber staff with the ability to represent the monarch’s authority, see David Starkey, “Representations through Intimacy: A Study in the Symbolism of Monarchy and Court Office in Early Modern England,” in Ioan Lewis (ed.), Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-Cultural Studies in Symbolism (New York: Academic Press, 1997), 187-224.
act as extensions of the queen by confining it to the very strict confines of what has traditionally defined high politics such as policy making.

Therefore, the privy chamber women were politically significant at the court because their continual attendance upon the queen allowed them to act as extensions of the queen and as bridges connecting Elizabeth to larger networks of subjects. Just as clients (relatives or non-relatives) could use the privy chamber women to make a connection to the queen, Elizabeth could use these women as conduits through which her royal favor could pass to people not at court. Being able to represent the queen and pass on her favor and the occasional concrete manifestation of that favor in the form of patronage did not strip these women of political significance, but rather was the very kernel of it. Although Elizabethan court women were following in the footsteps of their earlier Tudor and Yorkist aristocratic predecessors in participating in the system of royal patronage, under Elizabeth (and Mary I), a queen regnant, these women were the inner ring of the sole center of power—not part of the inner circle of the spouse of the monarch, but the monarch, herself.¹²⁸ However, what has not yet been done by most scholars is to explore the political significance of representing the queen and acting as a bridge to connect the queen to networks of her subjects outside of the realm of policy-making and the quest for royal patronage.¹²⁹ The agenda of the rest of the dissertation, therefore, is to chart some of the ways in which the privy chamber women used these politicized roles as brokers of royal favor and extensions of the queen to help Elizabeth

¹²⁸ For earlier precedence see Harris, “Women and Politics,” and Harris, English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550.
and her subjects not only build links of loyalty to each other but also to shape Elizabeth’s politicized public image which in turn supported the queen’s monarchical authority. Elizabethan female courtiers participated in the construction, maintenance, spread, and perpetuation of Elizabeth’s public image and her sovereignty. Acting as extensions of the queen did not strip these women of political importance, but rather empowered them to represent the queen outside of the palace allowing the queen to spread her royal authority and favor outside of the court.
Chapter 2:  
Fashioning Monarchy: Clothes, Power and Politics at Court

Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, began the year 1600 in disgrace and under house arrest. Throughout the late 1580s and early 1590s, Essex became a favorite of Elizabeth, a privy councilor, and an important member of her government. Along the way, Essex had made both errors and enemies. However, in late 1599 he had made two egregious mistakes. While he was fighting rebels in Ireland, he felt his position at court was being undermined by his enemies during his absence. His fears grew so great that he disregarded Elizabeth’s orders, left his post in Ireland (mistake number one), rode straight to London and stormed directly into her bedchamber at ten o’clock in the morning while the elderly queen was still dressing (mistake number two). Elizabeth responded to both of Essex’s rash actions by keeping him under house arrest, and away from his wife, children, mother, and siblings. But despite his exile from court, Essex still managed to participate in the New Year’s festivities. As recorded in a letter written on 5 January 1600 by Rowland Whyte, Sir Robert Sidney’s agent at court, as the queen watched her ladies dance,

Here was an exceeding rich New Yeares Gift presented, which came, as it were, in a Clowde, no Man knows how; which is neither receued nor rejected; and is in the Hands of Mr. Controller. Yt comes from the poor Earle, the Downfall of Fortune (as it is thought).

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Although it is unclear what exactly the gift was, there is a strong possibility it was a jewel or a garment. What was certain was that the queen did not publicly accept it or reject it, keeping the earl’s position at court ambiguous. Elizabeth knew that if she accepted it or outwardly rejected it she was concretely and publicly stating whether or not the earl was back in her good graces. The earl’s mother, the Countess of Leicester, and one of his sisters, Lady Rich, also sent gifts to the queen to help Essex regain the queen’s favor. Whyte, in another letter dated 12 January 1600, gave Sidney an update on the earl of Essex’s condition:

The Lady Rich earnestly followes her Desire to have Leaue to goe see him; she writes to her Majestie many Lettres, sends many Jewels, many Presents. Her Lettres are read, her Presents recueed, but no Leaue granted. The Lady Lester sent the Queen a rich New Yeares Gift, which was well taken. The jewels Lady Rich sent Elizabeth were in addition to her New Year’s gift to the queen of a piece of clothing, recorded on the gift roll as, “one Rounde Whyte kirtell of . . . squares of silver & white tuftes.” However, that same New Year’s gift roll does not list either Essex’s gift or his mother’s as having been received. There is also no record that Elizabeth I bestowed upon them any gilt plate in return. Perhaps writing a gift on an official court document was tantamount to publicly putting words into the queen’s mouth,

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4 Essex gave the queen a New Year’s gifts that had something to do with jewels and clothing. In 1584 he gave Elizabeth a case for a doublet and a richly decorated forepart, BL, Egerton MS 3052, in 1588 and 1598 he gave Elizabeth elaborate jewelry, BL, Additional MS 8159 and TNA, C 47/3/40 respectively. Unfortunately there are only seven extant New Year’s gift rolls from the time of Essex’s court career, and out of those seven, the Earl is only recorded as giving gifts to Elizabeth three times. Without the other gift rolls, it unclear how consistently or inconsistently Essex gave gifts to the queen.


6 BL, RP 294/I.

7 BL, RP 294/I. Although the gifts presented by Lady Rich mentioned in Whyte’s letters were not New Year’s gifts (they accompanied each letter she sent that requested the queen’s permission to visit her brother), perhaps the New Year’s gift roll for 1600 recorded the gift Lady Rich gave to the queen and the gilt plate she received in turn, because Elizabeth saw the New Year’s gift as distinct from the jewels sent to press her suit on Essex’s behalf.
and thus, if Elizabeth wanted to keep things uncertain, any acceptance or rejection of these gifts could not be recorded.

While Essex and his family were sending gifts to the queen in an attempt to rebuild their relationship with her, Elizabeth was bestowing gifts upon the son of Robert Cecil, Essex’s leading rival at court. While Essex was suffering from the queen’s royal wrath, “Her Majesties Fauor increases towards hym [Robert Cecil] . . . her Majestie has bestowed vpon [his] Sonne, a gallant faire Boy, a Coate, Girdell, and Dagger, Hatt and Feather, and a Jewell to weare in yt.” In this example, it was the queen who was sending gifts of clothes to demonstrate her gratitude for Cecil’s loyalty and hard work. Whether it was Essex and his relatives utilizing gifts of clothes and jewels or the queen using sartorial gifts, both examples demonstrate that gift-giving was a strategy to build ties between subjects and the monarch. Moreover, although it was often one person trying to forge a connection with the queen, Essex or Cecil, frequently the entire family was involved in the process. The examples of the queen, Cecil, and Essex also demonstrate that the links between queen and subjects were often forged through gifts of garments, cloth, and jewels.

The exchange of New Year’s gifts between the queen and English peers, high government officials, royal relatives, and select subjects was a way to build ties of loyalty.

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8 Whyte to Sidney, 5 January 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 156. Elizabeth may have promised this gift in January, but given it to Cecil’s son later on in the year. A warrant was issued in April 1600, TNA, LC 5/37 p.192, that listed all the clothes Elizabeth wanted made for herself and the gifts she wanted made for others including, “Itm for making of a Coat of Crimson veluet for William Cecill w\*\*\* a siluer lace about it, the bodies and sleues wrought w siluer lace, lined w sarcenet and Taffeta, the bodies stiffened w Canvas, and quilted w bombast and a paire of sleues of white Satten cut and laced w siluer lace lined w Taffeta sarcenet and fustian. And for one girdle and a dagger siluered ….” Although this warrant did not include the hat and jewel, the rest of the outfit matches the garments Whyte relayed in his letter. I have found no other warrant issued closer to January 1600 that describes this gift. Indeed, after September 1599, there is a warrant dated February 1600, but it is for the Maundy service, and not the bi-annual list of the queen’s necessities.
based upon reciprocity. In this chapter, I would like to place the New Year’s gift exchange in the larger context of the circulation of cloth, clothing and dress accessories at the Elizabethan court and to focus upon the important roles that clothing and the privy chamber women played in the system of courtly gift exchange. The New Year’s Day gift exchange was only one forum where the queen and her subjects were able to present gifts to each other. Over the course of her reign, Elizabeth received a wide range of presents, from purses filled with money to hundreds of gifts of clothing, cloth, dress accessories and furniture. Periodically throughout the calendar year, Elizabeth also showed her favor by giving a courtier new clothes or clothes from her own wardrobe. More systematically she distributed clothing in the form of livery to certain royal household positions, her artificers, and to members of her court for state events. The royal household followed the early modern practice of bestowing upon their servants livery, or clothing marked by colors and/or symbols that declared which family they were serving. 9 It was also standard operating monarchical procedure to send foreign ambassadors away with gifts of jewelry and gilt plate. In personal and diplomatic correspondence, courtiers, subjects, and foreign ambassadors recorded their attempts to choose gifts for the queen and her reception of them.

The ways in which Elizabeth I and her subjects used gifts and livery fits into the framework established by anthropologists and utilized by historians for analyzing gift-giving in pre-industrial societies. 10 As Marcel Mauss argued, gift-giving in archaic societies was not a purely altruistic act, but rather the purpose of the gift was to bind the

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giver and the receiver in a mutual reciprocal relationship. The gift could be used as a means to show gratitude for past favors or to build up credit for future requests.\textsuperscript{11} Mauss’s theory of gift-giving has been critiqued for divorcing gift exchange from the realm of politics. As scholars have argued, during Elizabethan New Year’s gift-giving, politics were very much imbedded in the strategies behind English subjects’ gifts to their monarchs. Families and individuals gave gifts of money, jewels, or clothes as an implicit appeal to keep the lands and government offices that maintained their elite social status.\textsuperscript{12} An important facet of this argument focuses on the types of gifts many Elizabethan female courtiers gave to Elizabeth, namely gifts of clothes and other articles of hand-wrought needlework, which had an intimacy that endowed them with more “authority and efficacy” than gifts of cash.\textsuperscript{13} Other scholars have also demonstrated how women used needlework to fashion their political identities and aspirations as well as forge political networks.\textsuperscript{14} Like gifts, livery functioned in much the same way, since the very purpose of distributing livery was to create a “form of incorporation . . . that inscribed obligations and indebtedness upon the body. As cloth exchanged hands, it bound people in networks of obligations.”\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, the exchange and circulation of dress created


\textsuperscript{13} Klein 471. More generally Jones and Stallybrass 19, argue that gifts of dress were more binding than gifts of money.

\textsuperscript{14} Klein 485: Frye 166; Jones and Stallybrass 153-154.

\textsuperscript{15} Jones and Stallybrass 20.
political networks and distinguished the members who participated within those networks. Clothes connected the monarch not only to individuals but to groups such as families and towns. Portraits and (as will be later discussed) letters all bear witness to the active agency of sartorial gifts in forging and perpetuating connections between the queen and her subjects.

As this chapter will argue, politics were deeply embedded in the distribution of cloth, clothes, and clothing accessories at court. Whether in the form of livery or of gifts, garments and jewels were important tools of domestic and international statecraft creating ties between the giver and the receiver of the gift. Systematized exchanges of dress and its accessories at Elizabeth’s court constituted a space in which subject and monarch could fashion each other’s political identity. This system of sartorial exchange had many levels: consulting others on what to give, helping people obtain gifts, presenting the gift, recording or relaying Queen Elizabeth’s reactions to gifts, and maintaining the gifts once received. Although both men and women actively participated on every level of this courtly system of gift exchange that mutually bound the queen to her subjects, this chapter highlights the ways in which court women, especially the women who served in the privy chamber, engaged in the politics of the Elizabethan gift exchange. Through an examination of the courtly system of sartorial gift exchange historians can more accurately and centrally analyze the role of women in Elizabethan politics; for through sartorial gifts women were able to participate in multiple political acts, including the construction of Elizabeth’s public image and the creation of ties to the monarch that could be used for political favors. Clothing was a form of political currency at the Elizabethan court and female courtiers often acted as brokers in these politicized
sartorial transactions. Moreover, through the analysis of the circulation of gifts of dress and dress accessories historians’ understanding of the use of clothing and the creation of majesty becomes more nuanced. Monarchs did not simply use gorgeous dress to create a majestic setting to awe a passive audience. The courtly gift exchange also provided courtiers with the ability to participate in the performance of monarchical majesty and supply the media that manufactured it.

**Cloth Connections**

The reign of Elizabeth I began and ended with the distribution of cloth and clothing in the form of livery. Coronation cloth was given to members of the royal household, from the nobility and gentry to the lowly servants. The men and women who received yards of crimson or scarlet fabric to wear during the queen’s coronation ceremony would be visibly demarcated as members of the queen’s royal court. Just as an ocean of scarlet and crimson cloth formally signaled the beginning of Elizabeth I’s reign, a somber sea of black and purple signified its end. 16 Once more, a range of fabric and garments was distributed among the funeral participants. And just as the portioning out of coronation cloth spanned the social hierarchy within the royal household, the funeral account book reveals that, in addition to the nobility and gentry who were the recipients of black cloth, humble court servants, such as the footmen, also collected their allotted four yards apiece of black cloth. 17

Elizabeth’s January 1559 coronation richly illustrates the importance of dress and its accessories at court and the crucial roles women played in this courtly sartorial

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16 TNA, LC 2/4/3 is the account book for Elizabeth I’s coronation and TNA, LC 2/4/4 is her funeral account book.
17 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.57av.
system. The account book for Elizabeth I’s coronation lists the liveries given to the men and women who served the royal household. The royal servants belonged to almost every social station from the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk, the highest ranking peers in the kingdom, to the lowly footmen, and the book states who received what type of cloth or clothes for the coronation and its preceding festivities. For example, Mistress Catherine Asteley, chief gentlewoman of the queen’s privy chamber, was allotted seven yards of scarlet for the actual coronation ceremony and fifteen yards of crimson velvet and two yards of purple tinsel to enable her to “attende vpon the Quenes maiestie on The Even of hir Highnesses Cornation.” Just as the scarlet material signified who was part of the Queen’s coronation, certain sartorial accents signified the social differences among the group. Whereas Asteley had been given “Tincell purple with work” to accent her dress of scarlet, Elizabeth Marbury only received “Velvett cr[imson] for the sleves” of her gown of crimson damask. Both women were privy chamber attendants and only members of the gentry, lower than the aristocracy, but Asteley’s higher position within the privy chamber is marked by the type of cloth she obtained from the wardrobe of the robe; embroidered purple tincel was of higher quality than crimson velvet.

The rich fabrics distributed for the coronation were not only recorded in the coronation account book. A portrait exists that may record the royal livery for one of the women who participated in the coronation (Figure 2.1). Although the portrait is entitled, Portrait of a woman, aged 16, previously identified as Mary Fitzalan, Duchess of Norfolk, the second wife of Thomas Howard, fourth Duke of Norfolk, and was painted in 1565 by Hans Eworth, the sitter’s clothes suggest that it is actually a 1565 copy of an

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18 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.61v.
19 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.62r.
earlier portrait of Margaret Audley, Norfolk’s first wife. The first duchess had been one of the forty-two female participants in the coronation ceremony, and the records indicate that she was designated two yards of cloth of gold for turning up the sleeves along with her sixteen yards of crimson velvet. Not only do the materials depicted in the portrait appear to represent the types of materials dispatched to Audley for the coronation, but the style of dress follows the general line of fashion for 1558 and is out of date for the 1560s. By 1565, the sleeves of women’s dress were not as tight from the shoulder to the elbow, and the deep cuffs and balloon-like under sleeves had been abandoned for sleeves that

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20 The first scholar to question the identity of the portrait’s sitter by analyzing the clothing was Janet Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe Unlock’d* (Leeds: W.S. Maney & Sons, Ltd., 1988), 56-57.

21 The coronation account book, TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.59v, only records that the duchess received “Velvet Crimsin xvj yards/Clothe of golde, yelowe Playne}ij yards. Another manuscript source TNA, E 101/429/3 f.8v states that for the coronation the duchess received cloth of gold for the ‘turning up the sleeves.’ See also Janet Arnold, “The ‘Coronation’ Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I,” *The Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978), 727-741.
had slightly extended shoulder wings and were of equal width from the shoulders to the wrists.\textsuperscript{22}

The lavish outfit worn by the duchess in her portrait speaks to the public function of clothing in constructing monarchical splendor. The overall purpose of the early modern practice of bestowing livery, or garments, to household servants as a form of payment for services rendered was to sartorially label people according to their social rank and to visually declare their associations to particular institutions, such as the monarchy.\textsuperscript{23} The duchess was one of hundreds of individuals dressed in such distinctive, eye-catching garments which demarcated the wearers as members of the royal household.\textsuperscript{24} A pamphlet commemorating Elizabeth’s procession through London to Westminster the day before her coronation, recorded the spectacle of the queen’s retinue:

the most noble and Christian princesse, oure mooste dradde soueraigne Lady Elizabeth . . . marched . . . through the citie of London towarde Westminster, richly furnished, and most honorably accompanied, as well with gentilmen, Barons, & other nobilitie of this realme, as also with a notable trayne of goodly and beawtiful ladies, richly apoynted.\textsuperscript{25}

Both the above passage and the coronation account book speak to how majesty was created and maintained by the monarch surrounding him/herself with men and women appropriately dressed. As R. Malcolm Smuts has argued, although royal entries and other public displays of monarchical power utilized allegory, most of the public only witnessed


\textsuperscript{23} Jones and Stallybrass 4-5.


\textsuperscript{25} \textit{The Passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Elyzabeth through the citie of London to Westminster the day before her coronacion} (London: Richard Totull, 1558/9).
fragments of the overall production. Although the majority of the crowds may not have heard the speeches or seen the tableaux vivants, they would have been impressed with courtiers dressed in elaborate silks and rich jewelry. In the case of a coronation, appropriate dress was lavish velvets, silks, and satins. For a royal funeral, the proper attire was traditional mourning costume, which mostly consisted of cloaks and hoods.

Both Elizabeth I’s coronation and funeral were state-sponsored events that required their participants to be dressed in a very particular way. The clothes were so important that they were issued by the royal Wardrobe of the Robes and were considered government expenses because they were all used for displaying royal power. Even the way in which the disbursement of cloth was written in the various account books illustrates the connection between clothing and state sponsored spectacle. In the funeral account book there are orders of black cloth not only for the funeral mourners, but also for the horses leading the chariot, the material draping the chariot bearing the coffin, and the “couering of the same Coffin wth purple velvet garnished wth guilt nailes.”

Supplying hoods for the funeral mourners or plumes for the horses carrying the corpse were all considered government expenses because they were all used for displaying royal power.

The account books of Elizabeth I’s coronation and funeral and the printed pamphlet of the last Tudor coronation entry provide evidence that clothing was an important part of constructing the fitting backdrop for displaying monarchical power. However, the portrait of the Duchess of Norfolk speaks of an additional role played by

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27 TNA, LC 2/4/4 f.2r.
clothing at the early modern court. Dress and its accessories did not just construct an impressive setting to highlight the majesty of the ruler; gifts of cloth, clothes, and dress accessories created networks that bound subject and monarch, and enhanced a subject’s prestige. If the portrait does commemorate the first duchess’s role as a participant in the coronation, it records in paint the gift of cloth from the queen and testifies not only to the prominent role played by the woman at her monarch’s coronation, but also represents her overall importance as a peeress in one of the most powerful families in the realm. Although she was not often present at court, due to her high rank she was accorded a court position: a lady of the privy chamber without wages. The position did not pay financially, but served as a royal mark of favor, not only to Margaret Audley, but also to her natal and marital families.

Moreover, the duchess literally wears her monarch’s favor and her social importance. Therefore, the clothes worn in this portrait demonstrate the Howard and Audley families’ ability to gain high court positions and rewards. Placing this portrait in the context of family strategy (as discussed in the introduction) allows historians to see that women could play an important role in the formation of family histories. Even if the duchess did not commission this portrait, the fact that she was commemorated in paint reveals that her person, accomplishments, and connections to court were considered an important chapter in the Howard family history. Although the duchess may have been given her court position because of her husband’s social rank, her position augmented the

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28 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.54v. In this entry she is listed as “Lady Norff.” I have examined the women listed throughout the Coronation account book and no other woman’s last name with the rank of Lady could be shortened to Norff as could the Duchess of Norfolk. Charlotte Merton, Appendix 1: Membership in the Privy Chamber, in “The Women Who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553-1603,” (Ph.D dissertation, Cambridge University, 1992), 258 came to the same conclusion.
Howard family’s fashioned image as powerful peers of the realm. In many ways it did not matter why a certain individual held a particular place of prominence, what was more important was that they did hold such a position and this fact was appropriated by the family enterprise. This portrait is thus more than just an individual statement; it is a visual declaration of the ties between the queen and the families connected to the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk.29

Acknowledging that clothing’s political power did not just rest in its ability to reflect a monarch’s majesty, but rather that it was also a political tool that actively constructed monarchical power and the power of both male and female courtiers, is critical in understanding the various ways women participated in court politics. Existing scholarship on dress and Elizabethan court women has argued that Elizabeth’s female attendants’ function, especially that of the young maids of honor, was to dress sumptuously to provide a backdrop for queenly splendor. For example, Violet Wilson, the author of the only full length book on Elizabethan court women, repeatedly places the queen’s women in the court’s background,

In this handsome background the Maids of Honor occupied a conspicuous and highly decorative place . . . Dressed in white and silver, they grouped themselves round the Queen, and were essentially a part of a well arranged picture designed for the enhancement of regal majesty.30

Moreover, as Jane Ashelford states, these women’s beautiful clothes “were expected to provide a harmonious . . . background to reflect, but not outshine the awesome figure of

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29 The case of the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk proves that although links could be forged, the chains did not always hold. The duke, after burying three wives, would be executed for treason when he tried to marry Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots.
30 Violet Wilson, Queen Elizabeth’s Maids of Honour and Ladies of the Privy Chamber (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1923), 3-4.
the Queen.”\textsuperscript{31} The language used to describe both the women and their clothing is highly gendered. Court clothes and court women are both assigned passive roles—they are only decorations to augment the queen’s glory. These women’s link to power is undermined by the conflation of dress and womanhood with a silent courtly landscape that can only confirm monarchical power, not construct or modify it. The clothes and by extension the women who wore them are subsumed into the monarch’s tapestry of power and sovereignty; they have no independent function.

However, as the Duchess of Norfolk’s portrait attests, clothing in the form of livery forged and represented political networks and alliances. As a recipient of Elizabeth’s livery, the duchess acts as one of the lynchpins in the chain of connections between the queen and the Howard family and clientele. Clothing given by the queen, either in the form of livery or as an outright gift, actively identified its wearers as important members of the court and bearers of the queen’s benevolence. The queen often distributed different types of livery to different members of her household during certain parts of the year. At least once a year, Elizabeth gave her artificers, or the various tradesmen who made her clothes, such as her tailor, skinner, hosier, and shoemaker, coats of red cloth decorated with red velvet and embroidered with the queen’s initials.\textsuperscript{32} A typical entry for such an order can be found in a warrant dated 28 April 1559 for the coat of Elizabeth’s tailor, Walter Fishe, “Itm iij yards of Clothe to make a Coate for the saide Waltar Fishe & ij yards of veluett to garde the same and for lynynge making and


\textsuperscript{32} The order of these liveries were usually made once a year and included in the same warrant that ordered the queen’s clothes and any garments she wished to give as gifts. These warrants are found in the TNA, LC5 series of the Wardrobe of the Robe account books LC 5/31, LC 5/32, LC 5/33, LC 5/34, LC 5/35, LC 5/36, LC 5/37. There is another Wardrobe of the Robe account book LC 5/49 and this seems to only contain orders for the liveries of the various members of the household from the musicians Elizabeth employed to her privy chamber women.
Enbrauderinge of oure L[ette]res.”

Not all liveries, however, explicitly labeled the wearers as servants of the crown. A warrant dated 28 November 1559, stated,

We will and Command you Immediatlye vpon the sighte hereof to delyver or cause to be Delyvered vnto oure welbeloved women ffauncis Newton, Dorothie Brodebelte and Elizabeth Marbery our Chamberers and to every of them for therrye Lyveries agaynste the feaste of Christmas Theis Parcells followinge That is to saye firste vnto every of them xiiij yards of Satten for a Gowne One yarde of velvet for gardinge the same gowne And also Sixe yards of Sarstnett to lyne the same gowne And that ye yerely fromehensforthe at the feaste of St Andrewe the apostle delyver vnto them for therrye liveries agaynste the feaste of Christmas the like Parcells . . . .

In this warrant, three women who served in the privy chamber received satin, velvet, and saracen (a light weight silk) for a gown. Unlike the tailor’s livery, this warrant does not instruct that the queen’s initials are to be embroidered upon the gowns. This distinction seems to depend upon the position for which the livery was dispensed as opposed to the gender of the position holder. Grooms of the privy chamber also received livery that was not embroidered with the queen’s initials. Moreover, the warrants which ordered the artificer’s livery never stipulated that they would receive these coats yearly, whereas the privy chamber women were to receive these materials every year at the feast day of Saint Andrew, 30 November. It is not clear if all privy chamber women received this livery.

Although warrants that issued livery to privy chamber women cannot be traced for every woman who served the queen in that capacity, some of the warrants contained the phrase, “to deliv[e]r or cause to be Delive[er]ed vnto our welbeloved Servaunte Nazareth Newton one of our Chamberers for hir liv[er]y Lyke as other our Chamberers yearly . . . .”

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33 TNA, LC 5/31 p.145. Walter Fishe was one of many artificers who received annual livery from 1558 until 1588 when Fishe either retired or died.
34 TNA, LC 5/49 p.126.
35 For example see TNA, LC 5/49 p.141, which is a warrant for the livery of Edward Cary, groom of the privy chamber.
36 TNA, LC 5/49 p.150.
specific phrase “her liv[er]y Lyke as other our Chamberers“ makes it clear that Nazareth Newton’s allocation of livery was the same livery that her fellow chamberers were receiving. Approximately half of the warrants do not specify the color of the material given to the female privy chamberers, but in the majority of the cases where the colors of the satin, velvet, and sarcenet were listed, the materials were all of the color black.\textsuperscript{37} As the warrants indicate, the privy chamber women, like many other servants in the royal household, received their livery annually.

Although some warrants clearly indicate when livery was being given out, not all of the warrants specify the nature of the clothes being ordered for the privy chamber women. Elizabeth occasionally ordered a number of identical dresses for women who worked in the privy chamber, but the word “livery” is not used. For example, a warrant dated 6 April 1581, ordered for Elizabeth Howard, Frances Howard, Margaret Carey, and Philadelphia Carey,

\textit{fower gownes of prple clothe of silur . . . layed wth lase of venice golde & carnacon silke edged wth white satten lined wth sarcenet the boddues wth buckeram ye Jaggs & hanginge sleves wth drawne owte wth lawne the rolls of bodyes & buckeram in the pleite and for them Layed allour wth lase of venice gould and carnacon silke cut & sett wth owes of gould lyned wth srcenet and fustian the clothe of silur . . . .}\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} The warrants that list that black satin, black velvet, and black sarcenet were given as livery to the privy chamber see TNA, LC 5/49 p.188, LC 5/49 p.220, LC 5/49 p.227, LC 5/49 p.241. One warrant, LC 5/49 p.150, did not list the color of the satin, but listed the velvet and the sarcenet distributed were black in color. There are three warrants for privy chamber women’s livery that did not indicate the color of the materials distributed, TNA, LC 5/49 p.126, LC 5/49 p.140, LC 5/49 p.174. The only warrant for livery for a privy chamber woman that listed a different color was the warrant for the livery of Elizabeth Stafford dated 20 November 1569, TNA, LC 5/49 p.170, which stated she was entitled to russet satin for a gown, but does list the color of the velvet used to gard the same gown or the color of the sarcenet that would line the same garment.

\textsuperscript{38} TNA, LC 5/35 p.238-9.
It is not clear if these outfits are livery or gifts. Although these dresses are all identical, they are much more lavish than the usual livery comprised of black satin, velvet, and sarcenet. These four gowns are very elaborate and made from much more expensive material and decorated with costly lace. On at least seven other occasions, Elizabeth issued identical dresses for at least two women, and on one occasion identical outfits were ordered for eleven women who served her as either maids of honor or privy chamberers.

The language of the various warrants does not always make it clear if the clothing ordered was livery or a gift. Part of the function of livery was to constitute part of a servant’s wages, and Elizabeth may have used gifts of clothes as a means to supplement wages. Although the warrants never specifically use the word “livery” some people received regular allotments of the same garments year after year, such as George Webster, the queen’s master cook as well as his replacement, John Smythson, and the clerk of the Guardrobe, Edmonde Pigeon and his successor Nicholas Pigeon. Ralph Hope, Yeoman of the Wardrobe, seems to have been given articles out of the queen’s wardrobe as a means to supplement his wages. He was often given worn out garments that could be unmade and the good parts of the fabric reused. In 1585 he was given the remnants of an old kirtle of white sarcenet that had been unmade and some of the

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39 Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe Unlock’d, *100-101, also discusses the difficulty in determining whether or not the warrants are describing gifts or livery.

40 In addition to the example cited above, see TNA, LC 5/33 p.167; LC 5/34 p.196-7 (this is the warrant that contained the order for eleven identical outfits); TNA, LC 5/35 p.155, 158; LC 5/36 p.253-4; LC 5/37 p.130, 133; LC 5/37 p.191, 193; LC 5/37 p.271.

41 The English crown was not the only monarchy to reward its loyal servants with a combination of salary, land grants and gifts of clothes and jewels. Past scholarship has also demonstrated that early modern French noblewomen often received gifts of jewels and of clothes as rewards for loyal service, see Sharon Kettering, “The Household Service of Early Modern French Noblewomen,” *French Historical Studies* 20:1 (1997), 73-75.
material cut to enlarge a pair of the queen’s sleeves. A kirtle was a female garment, but once unmade, the valuable material could be reused for another garment or for upholstery. There is also an entry from 1580 that makes it clear Ralph was being paid in clothes: “Item One nyght gowne of black wrought vellat . . . the owt side and lyninge being olde and past wearinge taken as a winter fee gowne by Rafe Hope.” Garments and material were monetarily very valuable and could serve the queen in many ways, to dress herself and her courtiers appropriately and as a means of paying her servants.

There are examples, however, where the language of the warrant does make it clear that Elizabeth was not bestowing garments as livery, but as gifts. For example, in a warrant dated 27 September 1585, it states, “It[e]m for makinge of a gowne of black Damaske (by vs gevin to Katherine West) . . . .” The phrase “by vs geven” is not seen in the warrants that specify the allocation of livery. Mrs. Bromefeld, who held the position of Mother of the Maids in 1597, did not get a garment, but rather she received seven

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42. TNA, C 115/91 f.86. The entire manuscript is printed in full in Janet Arnold, ‘Lost from Her Majesties Back’ Items of clothing and jewels lost or given away by Queen Elizabeth I between 1561 and 1585, entered in one of the day books kept for the records of the Wardrobe of the Robes, (Costume Society Extra Series No.7 (Wisbech, Cambridgeshire: Daedalus Press, 1980), 80; TNA, C 115/91 is the new shelfmark number for this document; previously it was C 115/L2/6697 which was the reference number used by Arnold.

43. TNA, C 115/91 f.72; Arnold, Lost, 69.

44. TNA, LC 5/35 p.418. Although Katherine West is not listed in Charlotte Merton’s extensive, but still incomplete Appendix 1: Membership in the Privy Chamber, 247-269, she was probably a privy chamberer. Her name was listed alongside other privy chamber women in an April 1588 warrant to take charge of various stuffs ordered for the queen, see TNA, LC 5/36 p.67. As records for privy chamber women’s employment are often incomplete, it is possible that Katherine West was already working for Elizabeth by 1585. Another very strong possibility is that Elizabeth wanted to continue to strengthen her ties with the West family. One Mistress West, a gentlewoman, regularly exchanged gifts with Elizabeth at New Years from 1575 (Folger, Z.d.14) until 1589 (BL, Lansdowne Roll 17). Although it is unclear if Katherine West had any relations also at court, two other women with the last name of West also received sartorial gifts from the queen. Anne Weste was one of eleven recipients of identical, but lavish gowns, and the ten other women were either Maids of Honor or privy chamberers, so it is possible, that Anne West was a privy chamberer too in 1572, see Arnold, Queen’s Wardrobe Unlock’d, 100, TNA, LC 5/34 p.196-7. A Joan/Jane West also received garments in the 1560s and throughout the 1570s, see TNA, LC 5/31 p.7; LC 5/33 p. 86, p.113; LC 5/34 p.154, 212, 240, p.283; LC 5/35 p.78, p.175. I do not know if Jane West served the queen in any official capacity or if she was related to either Anne or Katherine.
“yards of black wrought velvet by vs geven.” Although not every warrant used a variation of the phrase “by vs geven” it is clear that Elizabeth distributed a wide range of sartorial gifts including entire outfits, shoes, one or two garments, expensive cloth, and fashion accessories such as a “hat of black taphata embroidered all over with silk” which the queen gave to Elizabeth Knollys, a privy chamberer, in 1570.

Throughout Elizabeth I’s reign, almost every warrant that ordered the queen’s dresses and materials for her wardrobe, included orders for sartorial gifts. Usually the gifts were for women, many of whom worked or had worked in the privy chamber, while the majority of garments that were ordered for men were in the form of livery. Perhaps Elizabeth tended to give her female attendants gifts more often than her male servants, because working in the privy chamber was the highest position in the royal household that women could attain. While men could be promoted to higher government positions or household offices with higher salaries or even a title of nobility, Elizabeth was limited in how she could reward and recognize her faithful serving women. Presents of expensive and lavish garments may have been one of the few ways Elizabeth could financially compensate her female privy chamberers and encourage their faithful service.

Elizabeth’s privy chamber women may have also been the primary recipients of Elizabeth’s sartorial largesse because these gifts not only demonstrated Elizabeth’s favor towards them, but also because these costly clothes could help defray the cost of living at

45 TNA, LC 5/37 p.63.
46 TNA, C 115/91 f.35, Arnold, Lost, 42.
47 Roughly counting the garments I recorded in a database, approximately 394 gifts of jewels, cloth, and garments were given to women, whereas sartorial gifts to men only came to 94. These numbers do include some of the orders for garments that were clearly for livery. Although I do not have an exact number of orders for women’s livery, in TNA, LC 5/49 there are approximately 128 warrants ordering liveries, but only 15 of those warrants dealt with the livery of female members of the royal household.
48 Merton 13, also comments that the women of the privy chamber were limited in the ways they could augment their wages.
court. A case in point is Anne Knollys who was a privy chamberer. In April 1569, Elizabeth ordered for Anne Knollys two different types of gowns, sleeves, a cloak, eight pairs of cloth hose, two verthingales (hoop shirts), one pair of pantobles (over shoes), eleven pairs of shoes, and one pair of slippers. More than likely, Anne Knollys received such a generous gift because she had only recently come to court. The queen also helped her poorer courtiers throughout the time of service. The sisters Anne and Elizabeth Russell, both of whom served as maids of honor, received elaborate dresses in 1598 and in 1600. The Russell sisters were of high birth, but the death of their father had left them financially poor. The sisters Ladies Katherine and Elizabeth Somerset, also maids of honor, were like the Russell sisters financially ill provided for; they too received gifts from the queen in the form of outfits in 1595 and 1596. The elaborate gifts of garments would definitely help her less wealthy courtiers manage the expenses easily accrued at court, and this may be why Elizabeth tended to give more clothes to men and women of the lesser nobility and the gentry rather than to the great peers or her male favorites. Whereas Lady Mary Scudamore, a privy chamberer, received twenty-seven gifts between 1572 and 1584, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, only received two

50 See Merton, Appendix 1: Membership of the Privy Chamber, 263.
51 TNA, LC 5/37 p.130, 133; TNA, LC5/37 p.191; 193 In this warrant the two Russell sisters and another maid of honor, Lady Dorothy Hastings, all received rich outfits.
53 Strong 27. The warrants ordering the outfits see TNA, LC 5/37 p.59-60, 61; LC 5/37 p.88, 89. In both warrants, the Somerset sisters’ dresses were two of three identical dresses ordered. In 1595, the third recipient was another maid of honor Lady Elizabeth Vere, and in 1596, the third maid of honor was Lady Elizabeth Clinton. I do not know if Lady Vere or Lady Clinton came from financially pressed families, but court costs often forced the most prosperous courtiers into heavy debt.
sartorial gifts: a cloak and some furs. Gifts related to dress provided the queen with the means to show favor and relieve the financial stress of serving at court.

Often a privy chamber woman’s marriage offered the queen an opportunity to present her faithful serving woman with a rich gift in the form of garments. Although Elizabeth has been portrayed by historians as a jealous monarch who begrudged her courtiers their marriages, the Wardrobe of the Robe accounts belie this notion. According to the Wardrobe of the Robe accounts, Dorothy Broadbelt and Elizabeth Stafford were specifically ordered clothes to celebrate their marriages, and Lady Elizabeth Manners received a jewel as a wedding present from Elizabeth. Although some of the warrants do not explicitly state that the queen was giving clothes to celebrate a woman’s marriage, the recipient’s new marital status was acknowledged in the entry in some way. Shortly after Francis Newton became Lady Cobham in February 1560, she was ordered a black velvet gown cut in the French fashion, a loose gown of purple velvet, and a kirtle in the French fashion made out of purple cloth of Silver, and a French kirtle made out of purple cloth of gold all of which were richly lined and decorated. It is very likely that an important affair such as a wedding would justify these rich garments. Moreover, her change in status was noted in the April 1560 warrant with “Item for . . . makinge of a frenche gowne of black

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54 I reached my total number of gifts for Mary Scudamore by going through the TNA, LC 5/31-37 Wardrobe of the Robe Account books and TNA, C 115/91; For Leicester see TNA, C 115/91 f.44, 45; Arnold, Lost, 47-49.
55 For Dorothy Broadbelt see TNA, LC 5/34 p.26, which states, “makinge of a flaunders Gowne of blacke velvet wth Satten Grounde for the marriage of Dorothy Broadbelte to Mr. Abington,”; For Elizabeth Stafford see TNA, LC 5/34 p.239, which states “To Mrs Elizabeth Stafford against her marriage to Mr Drurye . . . .”; and for Lady Elizabeth manners see “Juells geven to her Majeste at Newyer’s-tide, anno 15° regni sui, and charged upon the Ladye Howarde,” in John Nichols (ed.), The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, (London 1823), I, 324, which reads, “Geven by her Majestie to the Lady Elizabeth Mannors at her marriage.” Unfortunately, the original New Year’s gift roll that this list refers to no longer exists.
velvett for ffrances Newton nowe Ladye Cobham.\[^{56}\] Other women who were granted elaborate clothes in warrants also have their change in marital status acknowledged. In a warrant dated November 1560 both “Eliz Norwiche nowe Lady Caro” and “Douglas Hawarde nowe lady Shefeld” were ordered elaborate garments. Using the maiden name and the married name in the warrant probably speaks to the fact that the change in marital status was recent, and therefore, supports the idea that these were wedding gifts. For example, Douglas Howard married John Sheffield, second Baron Sheffield in the fall of 1560.\[^{57}\] In April 1595 a warrant ordered a gown for “for the Lady Elizabeth Vere nowe Countesse of Darby,” who had married William Stanley, sixth Earl of Derby on 26 January 1595, demonstrating that this was a formula utilized throughout Elizabeth’s reign.\[^{58}\]

A more complex case is that of Mary Shelton, one of the queen’s privy chamberers, who married Sir John Scudamore. As discussed in chapter one, when the queen discovered in 1574 that Shelton and Scudamore had secretly married earlier in the year, she did not initially react with kindness and gifts. Instead, Elizabeth physically attacked the now Lady Scudamore with a hair brush.\[^{59}\] However, in October of 1575


\[^{57}\] For the date of Lady Sheffield’s first marriage see, Simon Adams, “Sheffield [nee Howard], Douglas, Lady Sheffield,” \textit{ODNB}, L, 159. The materials used in these gifts speak to their sumptuousness. Lady Carew received one outfit “altered and newe” made that was of purple velvet and sarcenet with sleeves made up of cloth of gold. Purple connoted royalty, and since the dress had once been Elizabeth’s, this dress was doubly endowed with connotations of royal dress. Lady Sheffield’s gift was no less rich as it was made out of Clothe of Silver. Sheffield’s gift was also of clothing that belonged to Elizabeth, but remade to fit the recipient. For description of both gifts see TNA, LC 5/31 p.197-198.

\[^{58}\] For the date of the marriage see Leo Daugherty, “Stanley, William, sixth earl of Derby,” \textit{ODNB}, LII, 249. For the description of this gift, see TNA, LC 5/37 p.59-61.

\[^{59}\] Arnold, \textit{Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe Unlock’d}, 101. It is important to note that Elizabeth did not act out of jealousy as much as anger against a distant relation who married without the queen’s consent. Less than six years prior, another one of Elizabeth’s relatives married without her consent which
Mary Scudamore signed for her gifts of two kirtles, sleeves, and a bodice, all of which were richly decorated and lined.\(^60\) This gift may have been offered to Lady Scudamore by the queen as a peace offering, signaling the reinstatement of Lady Scudamore to Elizabeth’s favor. The significance of Elizabeth giving gifts that celebrated or simply recognized her privy chamber women’s marriages is that these gifts of clothes reinforced the original bond between Elizabeth and the recipients of these gifts. Even more importantly, Elizabeth’s gifts in these instances acknowledged both her acceptance of the marriage and that the privy chamber woman’s marital family was now incorporated into the original network which had connected the queen to the woman’s natal family.

Clothing demarcated women as members of networks that connected the queen to her subjects, but these women’s connections to the queen also allowed their relatives to be in a position to receive royal gifts. Lady Elizabeth Drury (née Stafford), was the daughter of Lady Dorothy Stafford who served Elizabeth in the privy chamber from 1562 until the queen’s death in 1603, and was a privy chamberer in her own right from 1568 until 1599.\(^61\) Lady Elizabeth not only received thirteen gifts from the queen, but her son, daughters, and husband also received gifts of clothes and fabric for making clothes.\(^62\) Elizabeth Knollys married Captain Thomas Leighton sometime before 1579, but

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\(^60\) TNA, C 115/91 f.49. Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe Unlock’d*, 101, also suggests that this gift was a sign that things were mended between the Queen and Lady Scudamore. Arnold also notes that the queen seemed to forgive Mary many years before Elizabeth pardoned John, whom she did not knight until 1596.

\(^61\) For dates of service for both women see Merton, Appendex 1: Membership of the Privy Chamber, 268.

\(^62\) I added up the various gifts listed in the TNA, LC 5/31-37series of Wardrobe of the Robe account books and TNA, C 115/91.
continued to serve Elizabeth I until the end of her reign. In 1585, Elizabeth I gave Lady Leighton’s daughter a jewel. It was not just the family of Lady Leighton who received gifts, but in 1574 and 1576, one of her servants, Arthur Myddleton, received gifts of garments. Therefore, gifts of garments, cloth, and jewels were given by the queen, not only to the women who served the queen, but often the queen’s largesse extended to her female chamberer’s relatives. Indeed, a privy chamber woman’s position was not just an individual accomplishment, but one that reflected well on the entire family, and one that was supposed to bring rewards to be enjoyed by her family, friends, and clients.

Elizabeth I used one of the most important tools she had available, the giving away of dress, cloth, and dress accessories, to build support for her reign among her royal household attendants, especially her female privy chamberers, and the networks of people that the privy chamber women represented at court. The rich threads that constituted the garments made out of silk and velvet and given away by Elizabeth I wove the queen into relationships with the recipients of these sartorial gifts. Both livery and gifts of garments and fabric supplemented and augmented wages, but even more importantly, they created bonds much stronger than ones that could have been forged through monetary wages alone. Not only were these sartorial gifts of great monetary value, but as clothing they

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63 By following the Wardrobe of the Robe accounts, she is referred to as Elizabeth Knolles/Knowles until 1579 when she is then listed as Lady Leighton. In the 1579 New Year’s gift roll, Folger, Z.d.15, an Elizabeth Knowles gave a gift and no Lady Leighton is recorded. It is very possible that Thomas and Elizabeth married later in the year. The New Year’s gift roll for 1580 does not exist, and I have not been able to examine the 1581 roll at Eton College. However, the next extant gift roll is for 1585, BL, Egerton MS 3052, which lists a Lady Leighton but not an Elizabeth Knowles.

64 Folger, Z.d.16.


66 Elizabeth was not doing something new as a monarch by giving away clothes to show favor. Maria Hayward has demonstrated that Henry VIII often gave away his clothing to men and women, although mostly men, to demonstrate whom he favored, see Maria Hayward, “Fashion, Finance, Foreign Politics and the Wardrobe of Henry VIII,” Clothing Culture, 1350-1650, ed. Catherine Richardson (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), 165-178.
also symbolically incorporated the body of the wearer into that of the giver. When the maids of honor and privy chamber women wore their gifts or livery, they were dressing up in the queen’s largesse, demonstrating their loyalty to their queen, and showing their queen’s pleasure with their service.

The System of Courtly Sartorial Gift Giving

The queen’s toolbox of garments, fabrics, and jewelry was restocked not only through her expenditure on new clothes, but also through the gifts given to her by her courtiers. Gift-giving was not a strategy monopolized by the ruler, but one that was also employed by Elizabeth’s subjects to help them win their queen’s favor in general or to win her approval for a specific suit. Courtly gift-giving was routine in two ways. Presenting the queen with gifts, often of garments and jewelry, was routine in that it was a common method to establish ties and build up favor at court. Gifts were regularly used as a means to win lawsuits, government positions, or bids for property. Secondly, the exchange of gifts, often in the form of cloth, clothes, and clothing accessories, was routine in the sense that it was constantly taking place. Courtly gift-giving can be seen in its most institutionalized form on New Year’s Day, but as the Wardrobe of the Robe accounts and personal correspondence from courtiers attests, the queen and her subjects gave each other gifts consistently throughout the calendar year and throughout Elizabeth’s reign.

Gift-giving was a common practice not only at the Elizabethan court, but at courts across Europe, and gifts were often exchanged between people from different social classes as a means of confirming the hierarchical social and political relationships upon

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67 Jones and Stallybrass 19.
which early modern European society rested.\textsuperscript{68} What is striking about the gifts given at the Elizabethan court is that Elizabeth received more and more gifts in the form of dress and its accessories as her reign progressed. By analyzing the New Year’s gift rolls that are extant for her reign, historians can watch the dramatic increase in sartorial gifts to the queen. One of the earliest extant rolls, for 1562, records that Elizabeth received eighty-one purses filled with some type of coin (51%), forty-six gifts relating to dress and its maintenance (29%), and twenty-nine non-cash non-dress-related gifts (21%) such as John Betts, Sergeant of the Pastry’s gift of “oone pye of Quinces.”\textsuperscript{69} In 1577, Elizabeth received sixty-two monetary gifts (37%), ninety-five gifts related to dress (56%), and twenty-four non-cash non-dress related gifts (14%).\textsuperscript{70} In the last year of her reign, monetary gifts were dramatically reduced to only thirty-six purses (19%), as opposed to the one hundred and thirty-three items related to dress (70%) and twenty-one non-cash non-dress-related gifts (11%). Over the course of the entire reign, cash gifts were gradually reduced by more than half, whereas presents of clothes nearly tripled.\textsuperscript{71}

It is unclear if this change in types of gifts was something unique to Elizabeth’s reign. According to the one New Year’s gift roll from Mary I’s reign that I have examined (and possibly the only extant one) from the year 1557, Elizabeth’s half-sister

\textsuperscript{68} Although Davis’ book, \textit{The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France}, concentrates on the cultural, political, and economic value of the gift and how those values changed and informed each other over time in sixteenth-century France, she does not argue that they way the French understood and used gifts was different or singular from the rest of Europe. She also gives an over view of how the study of gift theory has transformed historians’ understanding of early modern state-building\textsuperscript{8-9}, and how the patronage system was often framed within the rhetoric of gifts\textsuperscript{37}. Klein 464 also argues that New Year’s Day gift-giving was a method that confirmed each person’s place within the social hierarchy, which in turn validated the social hierarchy in and of itself.

\textsuperscript{69} BL, Harleian Roll V.18.

\textsuperscript{70} TNA, C 47/3/39.

\textsuperscript{71} Klein 459, footnote 2 compares the gifts given to Elizabeth in 1562 and 1589.
primarily received money. This is noteworthy, because Mary, much like Elizabeth, was known for paying attention to dress and having no qualms about spending large sums of money on it. It is very possible that Mary did not reign long enough for people to know how to personalize their gifts to her. Henry VIII did receive a great number of gifts relating to dress, but they were mostly shirts and bonnets. Rarely did his subjects present their king with sumptuous garments. The majority of the gifts he received according to the four extant Henrician New Year’s gift rolls consisted of plate, cash, and non-dress/non-cash gifts often in the form of books, food items, and dogs. A meaningful comparison between Elizabethan and Henrician New Year’s gifts is difficult to establish since there are only four surviving Henrician gift rolls for a thirty-eight year reign. This dearth of evidence makes it tricky to ascertain any long-term trends of gift-giving under Henry VIII. However, it does appear that over the course of Elizabeth’s reign there was a tremendous rise in gifts of jewelry and lavish articles of dress that had no similar precedent under earlier Tudor monarchs. At this time there is also no clear reason why this change occurred. Indeed, the appreciation and enjoyment of fine clothing cannot be explained by Elizabeth’s gender. Subjects were not exploiting some feminine weakness for fine clothing when they sent Elizabeth a garment or a jewel. Both Henry VIII and his eldest daughter Mary I understood the power of lavish dress and kept an impressive

72 BL, RP 294/II.
73 Alison Carter, “Mary Tudor’s Wardrobe,” Costume (1984), 9-28. Carter’s work mostly focused on the four extant warrants executed for Mary’s wardrobe; no New Year’s gift rolls are discussed.
74 It is not only striking that Elizabeth received more sartorial gifts than her Tudor predecessors, but the types of garments given appear to be unique to Elizabeth’s reign. As Maria Hayward, “Gift-giving at the court of Henry VIII: the 1539 New Year’s gift roll,” Antiquaries Journal 85 (2005), 125-175, has demonstrated, although Henry VIII received 54 garments (25% of the gifts received) and 21 gifts of jewelry (just under 10% of total gifts received) out of a total of 222 gifts presented to Henry VIII, very few of the dress related gifts were as lavish as the outfits Elizabeth received. For example, in 1539 Henry only received one sumptuous outfit of a doublet and velvet hose striped with gold thread. The version of the 1539 New Year’s gift roll I analyzed was the annotated copy compiled by Maria Hayward from the Folger, Z.d.11 manuscript published in the above mentioned article, which also contextualizes the 1539 gift roll alongside the three other surviving Henrician gift rolls.
wardrobe. It is also remarkable that Elizabeth received more gifts of dress and dress accessories during the latter end of her reign. Perhaps as the Elizabethan economy grew more turbulent, gifts of dress and jewels had a more stable value that could withstand economic downturns.

Although Elizabeth’s sex might not in and of itself explain why Elizabeth received more gifts of dress, the fact that Elizabeth chose to rule as a single woman, often employing the trope of courtship, might play a part in this trend. The exchange of tokens, often in the forms of jewels or miniature portraits, was part of early modern courtships.75

And most of Elizabeth’s favorites, especially Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and Christopher Hatton usually gave the queen gifts of elaborate jewels or garments. Placing the sartorial gifts to the queen within the framework of courtship, does not, however, provide a suitable explanation for why women primarily gave Elizabeth gifts related to dress. The first group of people to provide the queen with sartorial New Year’s gifts were Elizabeth’s gentlewomen. From the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign until its end, this group of women rarely gave gifts of money, instead, they consistently and primarily offered the queen gifts that were related to dress, from elaborately embroidered handkerchiefs to beautiful jewels. Many of the women listed under the heading of “gentlewoman” on the New Year’s gift rolls were women who served or who had served Elizabeth in the privy chamber. One of the privy chamberers’ main roles was to dress the queen and care for her clothes and jewels. Perhaps by working so closely with the

75 Norman Jones, The Birth of the Elizabethan Age: England in the 1560s (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 98 and David Cressy, Birth, Marriage & Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 263, discuss how tokens were often exchanged during courtship, sometimes in the form of rings. Patricia Fumerton, Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 67-68, discusses how jewels, miniatures, and courtship were all part of Elizabethan politics. Miniatures which were often combined portraiture and jewelry were often used as love tokens, see Fumerton 70.
queen’s body and clothes, they were in the perfect position to realize what the queen needed in her wardrobe or what type of clothes she would like to receive as a gift.

Giving sartorial gifts, especially gifts made by the givers, may have had an additional level of appeal to it, that of intimacy. As Lisa M. Klein has argued, a “hand-wrought gift has a particular intimacy, authority, and efficacy that other gifts like money or plate lack.”76 Although most gift-givers did not make their sartorial gifts by their own hand, but rather employed tailors, the clothes offered to Elizabeth did function on a more intimate level. Once Elizabeth initially accepted the gift of money usually presented in a silk purse, she probably never saw it again, whereas clothing and jewels were items Elizabeth could wear repeatedly, always being reminded of the giver. Sartorial gifts were also intimate in the sense that they actually touched the queen’s body. Many of the items given to Elizabeth by both male and female courtiers were embroidered smocks, which was the very first garment a person put on when dressing. Other gifts that Elizabeth would have worn in private were night coifs, another item she frequently received as gifts. Thus, many of the gifts Elizabeth received were garments that touched her actual person, or were worn in her more private hours. Such intimate gifts had the potential to be very effective, since the goal of such presents was to build a personal relationship with the queen that could lead to political and economic gain later down the road.

For those not at court, finding the right gift that would strike that chord of intimacy required that they ask others for some direction. The privy chamber women were one of the most important sources for advice about sartorial gifts, but they could aid non-courtiers in other ways too. Indeed, being able to give the queen her gift was a process that required numerous steps such as selecting, presenting, and knowing how the

76 Klein 471.
gift was received. These steps constituted a system of sartorial exchange at court, and a
system which allowed women to play important roles. In addition to the roles of giver
and recipient, female courtiers often played the role of “middlewomen” helping the queen
distribute her gifts to her subjects, advising subjects who did not live at court on what to
give the queen, presenting an absentee gift-giver’s gift to the queen, and relaying back to
the giver the queen’s reaction to the gift.

There are two related incidents that demonstrate the ways in which sartorial gifts
functioned at court as well as the way in which women participated within the system. In
a letter dated 4 July 1583, William Poynz wrote to his employer, Sir Thomas Heneage,
who was a gentleman and treasurer of the privy chamber at the time, about the gift that
Poynz had presented to the queen on Heneage’s behalf:

I deliveryd your letters to Mistris Skydmore, and your token to her Majestie . . .
and receyved thys answer from her: thar her highness esteemed much of the
jewell both for the rareness and the devyse, becawse ytt was the best that ever she
sawe of that kynde, but she esteemed muche more of the good wyll of hym that
sent ytt, for whose sake she woolde weare ytt tyll hys retourne on that eare that
sholde not herken to any thinge that sholde any wayes hurte hym that sent ytt; and
as the woorde amat iste sine fine was yours to her so wolde she have ytt hers to
you I love sine fine. And besides that, for so gentleye remembering of herr she
sent you ten thowsand myllyons thanke s and wyll send you a token agayne before
your retorne, which she prayeth may be sone, as she mysseth you all redye. 77

In this excerpt we see that Thomas Heneage, who was either away from court or about to
leave court for an extended period of time, did not leave without giving the queen a gift,
in this case, a gift of a jewel. Here is an example which demonstrates how jewelry was
able to create and maintain personal relationships that held deep political implications.

Elizabeth not only praised the jewel because it was rare and symbolically interesting, but

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also because she knew it was a sign of Heneage’s “good wyll” towards her. In return for this expensive gift that represented Heneage’s loyalty, Elizabeth promised to wear it on her ear so that it would shield her from hearing any negative statements about him.

Elizabeth’s language describing the jewel’s power to literally and magically protect both Heneage and herself from hearing any slander against him reveals the ways in which sartorial gifts and the power of physical intimacy functioned. By Elizabeth wearing the jewel on her person, she would be reminded of a loyal servant, whose service had taken him away from court. For Heneage the jewel’s success was to prevent his absence from undermining the queen’s favor towards him. Since Heneage was not from an aristocratic family, his present and future success was entirely dependent upon the queen’s favor.

Being away from court often compromised a person’s court career as seen with Robert Sidney in chapter one, because once out of the queen’s sight, she might forget them and give her favor to someone who was by her side. Another potential threat was that of slander from which absent courtiers could not defend themselves. The gift of the jewel was to help Heneage avoid these pitfalls, and it would seem that he was successful.

Another important part of the story was that Elizabeth wanted to send Heneage a gift in return, to show her gratitude not only for his gift, but for the good will which inspired him to send it in the first place. William Poynz wrote again describing the gift that the queen gave to him to pass onto his employer, Heneage, but this letter was not written to Heneage, but rather to his wife, Lady Anne Heneage, who was also a member of the queen’s privy chamber. According to Poynz,

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It is very possible that Poynz also wrote to Heneage himself, but I have not yet found any such letter. The letter quoted above was addressed to “To the right woorshyppfull my especyall good ladye and Mistress the Lady Henneage, of her Majesties most honorable privye chamber,” Letter from William Poynz to Lady Heneage, 23 July 1583, in Report on the Manuscripts of Allan George Finch, Esq., 1, 26. Michael
I was yesternyght with Mistress Skydmore to knowe howe her Majestie dyd, who delivered me a token from her Majestie to my master. Ytt was a butterflye of mother of perle as I take ytt, with this messager, that her Execellencye knoweing that her Sanguyne was farre in the colde north countrye where no [butter]flyes weare, dyd send hym that butterflye to playe with, that he might allawayes remember her that sent ytt, and she herselfe dyd and woulde weare the bodkyn and pendant that he sent her on the eare that sholde heare nothing that sholde hurte him. . . .

In this letter we see how Elizabeth selected a gift that held important meaning for both herself and Heneage. The gift of the butterfly jewel had more than one level of significance. As Elizabeth clearly stated, the gift was to remind him of his queen, even though she was far away from him. Secondly, the fact that the jewel was in the form of a butterfly, something that did not live in the north of England because it was too cold (according to this story), this butterfly would be unique and rare, just as Elizabeth often presented herself. Elizabeth often used allusions to other animals, such as the phoenix, to declare her uniqueness and to justify her right to rule in spite of her sex. With the gift of the butterfly jewel, Elizabeth was able to create an intimate scene between herself and a beloved servant, using words like “play,” while simultaneously reinforcing her official public image as monarch.

The role women played in this process is another important aspect of this exchange of jewels between Elizabeth and one of her male government officials. Two women of the privy chamber are included in this exchange, Mary Scudamore (Skydmore) and Lady Heneage. Although Lady Heneage was an extraordinary gentlewoman of the privy chamber, it appears that Heneage needed another connection. As an “extraordinary”

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Hicks, “Heneage, Sir Thomas,” ODNB, XXVI, 447, states that she was an extraordinary gentlewoman of the privy chamber which is corroborated by the coronation account book which lists her under that category, TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.54r.

member of the privy chamber, Lady Heneage was not expected to attend to Elizabeth regularly, but to only come on special occasions “whan The Quenes ma’tie calleth for Them.” According to the Wardrobe of the Robe accounts, New Year’s gift rolls and other sources, there is no indication that she worked with Elizabeth’s clothes. Heneage’s wife still had a role to play, however; Poynz wrote this letter to her, surely expecting her to tell her husband. Whereas Lady Heneage’s role is that of passing on the story to her husband (a role that will be discussed further later on), Mary Scudamore plays the part of “middlewoman” brokering the exchange of gifts and promises between the queen and Sir Thomas. Elizabeth did not present the butterfly jewel directly to Poynz, but rather sent the jewel and the message that came with it through one of the privy chamber women. Scudamore may have been sent, because she already worked with Heneage in some capacity. In Poynz’s first letter addressed to Sir Thomas Heneage, he tells his employer that before he had delivered the jewel to the queen, he had delivered his letters to Mistress Scudamore, who worked closely with the queen’s clothing. In the New Year’s gift rolls and the wardrobe of the robe accounts, Scudamore is consistently put in charge of the smaller articles of dress such as sleeves, partlets, smocks, night coifs, and handkerchiefs. And as the chapter will discuss later, this was not the only time Mary Scudamore delivered a gift from the queen to various recipients. The exchange of jewels between Sir Thomas Heneage and the queen was not an exchange of mere trifles, but an exchange of pledges of fidelity to each other. Although not to the same extant, both the queen and Heneage depended upon the good will and favor of the other to keep

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80 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f.54r.
81 Mary Scudamore’s role as “middlewoman” was first discussed in chapter one, and we saw three different clients turn to Scudamore: Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, Gilbert Talbot, seventh Earl of Shrewsbury, and Sir Robert Sidney.
their political positions. Gifts of jewels and garments acted as political currency spent by both queen and her subjects to build up political support for each party involved. Viewing the exchange of sartorial gifts in this light reveals that the privy chamber women held the political position of brokers in this process.

The queen was not the only one who could use her privy chamber women in this fashion. Just as the queen assigned Mary Scudamore the task of delivering her gift to Heneage, subjects who were not able attend court could also use the privy chamberers to present gifts to the queen. For another case in point, let us return briefly to the troubles the Earl of Essex was facing at the beginning of this chapter. By March 1600, Essex was still under house arrest, and his mother and sisters were still trying to petition the queen for his release. Part of the problem was that his mother, Lettice Knollys, the Countess of Leicester, had earned the queen’s enmity for her secret 1578 marriage to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, one of the queen’s previous favorite male courtiers. Lettice had been banished from court until March 1598 when her son, Essex, still in favor with the queen, had brokered the meeting between the two women. However, Lettice had not been invited back to court after the March 1598 meeting, denying the countess the ability to directly plead her son’s case to the queen. By the end of January 1600 the countess had left her country estate to come to London, where she started her campaign to convince the queen to allow her to come to court where she could better help her son.82 Although the countess had tried to gain access to the queen, she had yet to meet with success by the end of February, prompting her to change tactics. As Whyte reported to Sidney on 25 February 1600, “My Lady Lester, hath nowe in Hand a Gowne she will send to the

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82 Whyte to Sidney, 24 January 1600, in Letters and Memorials, II, 164, writes “Now is arrived Lady Lester, his Mother, who is come vp of Purpose to be a Peticioner for her Sonnes Liberty.” The tortured relationship between Lettice Knollys and the queen will get discussed in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4.
Queen, which will cost her 100 l. at lest.”\textsuperscript{83} The countess had decided that sending a gift of clothing would help rebuild her relationship with the queen, a relationship she hoped would save her son from royal punishment and disgrace.

As Whyte’s letter indicated, the countess could not present the garment directly to the queen. Instead she had to send it to the court where it would be presented by a privy chamber woman. Once more Whyte reported the way in which the gown was presented to the queen and Elizabeth’s response:

Yesterday the Cowntess of Leicester sent the Queen a most curious fine Gown, which was presented by my Lady Skudamore. Her Majestie liked yt well, but did not accept it, nor refuse yt, only answered, that Things standing as they did, yt was not fitt for her to desire what she did; which was to come to her Majesties Presence, to kiss her Hands . . . and her Majesties Displeasure nothing lessened towards hym, nor any Hope of his Liberty.\textsuperscript{84}

The countess’ inability to attend court forced her to depend upon the privy chamber women to present her gift to the queen. In this particular case, we once again see that it is Lady Mary Scudamore acting as a broker in a transaction involving clothing and royal favor. Unfortunately for the countess, although the queen complimented the dress, she treated this gift as she did Essex’s New Year’s gift; Elizabeth neither accepted it nor rejected it, since she did not wish to change her policy concerning Essex’s imprisonment. Unlike the case of Lady Rich’s jewels, the queen did not feel she could accept the gift and refuse the request attached to it. Perhaps, because the presentation of the gown was such a public event, Elizabeth did not feel at liberty to take the gift, but refuse the suit. The public nature of this act is important, because it would determine how Elizabeth would respond to these gifts. Although the queen did accept gifts without any intention of

\textsuperscript{83} Whyte to Sidney, 25 February 1600, in \textit{Letters and Memorials}, II, 172.

\textsuperscript{84} Whyte to Sidney, 3 March 1600, in \textit{Letters and Memorials}, II, 174.
promoting individuals or granting their requests, this particular situation was very
delicate and very public.

The Earl of Essex’s situation was public knowledge, and the Countess of
Leicester’s act had been a public one. Almost every aspect of the gift, its presentation,
reception, and subsequent use involved a public component. Each time Elizabeth would
wear such a gift she would be reminded of the circumstances that put that gown in her
wardrobe. As discussed in the case of Sir Thomas Heneage, Elizabeth promised to wear
his gift to think about him even when he was not at court, just as she gave him a gift so
that he would think of her while away from her presence. Clothing’s power rested upon
its visual nature—dress and jewels were visual reminders of the connection between the
queen as recipient and her subjects, the givers. Mary Hill Cole speaks of the visual power
of gifts and how it directed the choices made by many towns when choosing the gift they
would present to the queen when she visited their town on one of her progresses. While
some towns simply gave money, others chose to present it in a purse or a cup. Cole
explains the difference between just handing over cash as opposed to attaching another
object to the package: “They hoped she would use the gilt cups and silk purses, along
with the occasional pair of gloves, and remember their worthy town.”

The very visual nature of gifts of dress and its accessories would act as constant reminders of the loyalty
of their givers, something that would be useful later if a courtier or town needed to ask
for a favor. The countess had hoped that Elizabeth would accept the gift of a gown to
further her suit and that of her son’s. Elizabeth, however, was not willing to tangle herself

85 Cole 103.
up in the strings attached to the gift, strings that could publicly trip her, not only when she accepted the gift, but possibly every time she wore it.\textsuperscript{86}

Just as the women could act as brokers in the courtly system of sartorial exchange, they could also act as consultants. Often when courtiers left their court positions, they maintained their court connections to help them from afar. Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, who had been a member of the privy chamber at the beginning of Elizabeth I’s reign, used her court connections to help her continue to choose presents for the queen. From 1569 until 1584 the Countess of Shrewsbury and her husband were in charge of Elizabeth I’s prisoner, Mary, Queen of Scots. During this period, the countess’s relationship with the queen was often strained as rumors circulated at court questioning whether the countess was loyal to Elizabeth or Mary. The countess wrote numerous letters to her main contacts, her half-sister, Elizabeth and her husband, Anthony Wingfield for advice to pick a gift that pleased the queen and would reassure her of the countess’ fidelity.\textsuperscript{87} Although the year is not given, one letter dated 4 December probably relates to a New Year’s gift. In it Mrs. Wingfield tells the countess,

\begin{quote}
I went to my lady cobham and we long confarde of the matter. I se by her she was muche against yow honour giving money. Mr. W and I founde her so muche
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{86} Eventually the queen did allow the countess to see her son, see Whyte to Sidney, 29 March 1600, in \textit{Letters and Memorials}, II, 182. Whyte does not comment if the queen finally accepted the gift of the gown.

\textsuperscript{87} Klein 469-461 also argues that Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury needed to have a successful New Year’s gift in order to mend her relationship to the queen which had been strained over the course of the year when her daughter had secretly married the son of the Countess of Lennox, mother-in-law to Mary, Queen of Scots and gave birth to a daughter who had claims to the throne of both England and Scotland. The marriage incurred the queen’s wrath, not only because it was done in secret and could affect the line of succession to the English and the Scottish thrones, but it meant that Mary, queen of Scots, who was under house arrest and in the custodianship of the earl and countess of Shrewsbury, was in contact with the Countess of Lennox which Elizabeth I had also forbidden. Mary S. Lovell in her biography of the Countess of Shrewsbury, \textit{Bess of Hardwick: Empire Builder} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 240-258, also recounts the countess’ machinations to marry her daughter to royalty and her use of gifts to mend her relationship with Elizabeth I.
against the same . . . truly if yow honour had geven money I feare yt would have bene ell liked.\(^{88}\)

This was not the first time that the Countess of Shrewsbury used her court connections to ask various privy chamber women advice on what gift to give the queen for New Year’s. There is a series of three letters exchanged in 1575-6 between the countess and her two court contacts, the Wingfields, that further illustrates the minute details courtiers needed in order to get the perfect gift for Elizabeth.\(^{89}\) In this instance, the countess needed more than just Lady Cobham. Anthony Wingfield wrote that the Countess of Sussex had suggested a few options to the Countess of Shrewsbury ranging from making bed hangings or a cloak in either peach or watchett colored satin and embroidered “wth sume prete flowares and leues wth sondrey coullares made wth gould spanggulles and sylke that fantaskecall thinges.”\(^{90}\) In a follow-up letter the Countess of Sussex explained that these “prete flowares” were pansies which “ye queen likes byst off that floware.”\(^{91}\) Even more than advising what to embroider, the Countess of Sussex suggested exactly what

\(^{88}\) Folger, Cavendish-Talbot Letters, X.d.428 (131), Elizabeth Wingfield to Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, 9 December no year given, but the Folger on-line guide to the Cavendish-Talbot letters, [http://shakespeare.folger.edu/other/html/dfcavendish.html](http://shakespeare.folger.edu/other/html/dfcavendish.html) suggest the year 1585 as a possibility.

\(^{89}\) There were a series of letters that appear to deal with the same New Year’s gift, Folger X.d.428 (127, 128, and 130). Unfortunately only one of them includes the year in the date, X.4.428 (127) which is dated 13 October 1575. Klein 470 uses 1575 as the date, but she was using Arnold and not the actual letter; Arnold, *The Queen’s Wardrobe Unlock’d*, 94, 108 fn. 18, 19 and the Folger on-line guide to the Cavendish-Talbot manuscripts also maintains that these letters range from October 1575 to 2 January 1576. The only way they differ is that the Folger guide to the Cavendish Talbot manuscripts is not sure if the letter X.4.428 (130) is 2 January 1576 or 1577. Dating this letter to 1576 makes sense since the gift mentioned follows the advice given by Lady Cobham and the Countess of Sussex in the letters X.d.428 (127 and 128). The only problem is that the New Year’s gift listed in the 1576 New Year’s gift roll, BL, Additional MS 4827, does not list garments matching the garments described in the letter. I have not yet traced a cloak of watchett satin embroidered with pansies, which was what was finally decided on according to the letters and reiterated by Arnold, *The Queen’s Wardrobe Unlock’d*, 95. Despite a discrepancy of matching the clothing in the letters to a New Year’s gift roll, these letters do show the ways in which subjects could turn to the privy chamber women for detailed advice on what would make the best gift to give the queen.

\(^{90}\) Folger, X.4.428 (127), Anthony Wingfield to Elizabeth Wingfield, 14 October 1575. This letter is dated October 1575 and appears to the cornerstone in determining the dates for the letters X.d.428 (128), and (130). It appears Wingfield discussed the matter mostly with Lady Sussex on this occasion as Lady Cobham was away. In this letter Anthony Wingfield also states that he has yet to talk to Mistris Scudamore on this matter.

\(^{91}\) Folger, X.d.428 (128), Anthony Wingfield to Elizabeth Wingfield, 13 December 1575.
type of garment, a cloak, and what type of color, watchett, a light blue.\textsuperscript{92} According to the Countess of Sussex, the queen did not have any garments of that color, whereas she had “sundry garments of as[h]coullore all Rede.”\textsuperscript{93} The first letter in this series was dated October 1575, revealing how long in advance courtiers had to start preparing to choose, purchase or make, his/her New Year’s gift to the queen. In addition to the amount of time needed, these letters also demonstrate how many people could be involved in such an important process. In the Countess of Shrewsbury’s case, her official contacts were the Wingfields, who in turn sought the council of Lady Cobham, the countess of Sussex, and perhaps even Mary Scudamore, all women of the privy chamber. Women and men worked together so that courtiers and non-courtiers presented the queen with appropriate gifts. These networks of people kept the system of clothing exchange moving smoothly and extended it to people not living at court.

Apparently, the Countess of Shrewsbury followed the advice of the Countess of Sussex with very successful results. Elizabeth Wingfield in a letter dated 2 January 1576 reported the queen’s reaction to the countess’ gift,

\begin{quote}
Her maj[estie] never liked any thinge you gave her so well the color and strange triminge of the garments . . . cost bestowed vpon yt hath caused her to gever out such speeches of my lo[rd] and you la[d[y] as I never hard of better. She toulde my lo[rd] of Lester and lo[rd] Chamberlen that you had never geven her such garments as thys yere as she never had any so well liked her and sayd that good nobell copell . . . shows in al things what love they bere me and surely my lo[rd] I wyll not be vnthankefull. If my lo[rd] and you la[d[y] had geven v hundred pound in my opennon yt would have bene so well taken . . . .\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{92} Folger, X.d.428 (128). According to Arnold, \textit{The Queen’s Wardrobe Unlock’d}, 95, watchett was a light blue color.

\textsuperscript{93} Folger, X.d.428 (128).

\textsuperscript{94} Folger, X.d.428 (130), Elizabeth Wingfield to Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, 2 January 1576. I have added the periods to the letter, but I have not altered the language in any way.
The queen’s words of appreciation must have been most welcome to the Countess of Shrewsbury. Once more we see how this gift of clothing helped repair the Shrewburys’ relationship with the queen. The sumptuous cloak embroidered with the queen’s favorite flower, the pansy, reminded the queen of the “love they bere me.” Moreover, the queen publicly promised that in return for this token of love and support, she would “not be vthankefull” towards the couple. Surely the Countess of Shrewsbury hoped that this gift would work in the same way Thomas Heneage’s jewel did—that it would keep the queen from listening to any rumors that could harm the Shrewburys’ standing with the queen.

The letter from Elizabeth Wingfield reveals that in addition to acting as consultants privy chamber women and female courtiers performed another important function in the courtly sartorial gift exchange: telling the gift giver how the queen received his/her gift. The Countess of Shrewsbury, like many other Elizabethan subjects who could not regularly attend court, depended upon their court contacts for information about the queen’s favor towards them. In 1601, it was the Lady Dorothy Stafford, a woman employed in the privy chamber, who informed the countess that she had presented the countess’s New Year’s gift as well as that of her granddaughter, Arbella Stuart, and that “the Queenes Ma[jes]tie whoo hath taken verie graciously accepted thereof and taking an especiall likeing to that of my La[dy] Arbella’s.” In return for Lady Arbella’s gift, the queen sent the girl a token and promised to fulfill the countess’ wish that Elizabeth would look after her.

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95 Folger, X.d. 428 (120), Letter from Lady Dorothy Stafford to Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, 8 January 1601.
96 Folger, X.d.428 (120). Lady Arbella Stuart was in a precarious position as she was a potential heir to both the Scottish and English throne and an orphan. Arbella was also relatively impoverished as many of the lands and jewels she could have inherited through her Lennox and Stuart relatives had been claimed by James VI of Scotland. The countess of Shrewsbury often petitioned Elizabeth I to help Arbella reclaim
women who discussed the queen’s response to a gift were often discussing more than whether or not the queen liked or disliked a gift, but rather the state of the queen’s relationship with the gift-giver, or the state of a subject’s suit.

A gift often provided the queen with an opportunity to publicly reinforce the connection between the gift of clothing and her relationship to the gift-giver. Sir William More was able to find out that his choice of gift had been a successful one from his daughter, who wrote, “Since my coming to the Court, I have had many gratious words of her Majestie . . . yesterday she wore the gown you gave her, and thereby took occasion to speak of you with many gracious speeches of yourself and my brother.”

This excerpt from an undated letter from a daughter to her father demonstrates exactly how gifts of clothes functioned. By choosing to wear a particular dress given to her by a particular courtier, the queen acknowledged her pleasure with the gift-giver. Elizabeth doubly reinforced the ties between her and Sir William More’s family by speaking about him and his son to his daughter who was at court. Just as livery dispensed by the queen visually and sartorially demarcated who was incorporated into the royal household, gifts of clothes and jewels given to and worn by the queen acted in much the same way. As Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have argued, clothing functioned as “material mnemonics,” standing in for names of either families or individuals. Whenever the queen wore a gift she was not only acknowledging that the recipient had forged a connection binding him/herself to the queen, but also establishing that she was a member of the giver’s circle. The queen, however, could not always make this clear to the gift

her wealth and to help raise her according to her position of a princess of royal blood. Lovall 417 discusses the letter from Dorothy Stafford, but discusses the position of Lady Arbella Stuart throughout the book. Nichols (ed.), The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, III, 82-83. Jones and Stallybrass 32.
givers if they were not physically at court. Instead, female courtiers, especially the privy chamber women, both connected Elizabeth to various networks of faithful subjects, and helped to extend Elizabeth’s presence by writing about the queen’s reception of gifts to those who could not attend court.

Relating the queen’s reaction to a gift was not confined to letters between family and friends, but was even a topic of international diplomacy and politics. While her cousin’s prisoner, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, tried to improve her position with Elizabeth with a sartorial gift. On the Queen of Scots’ request, the French ambassador presented Elizabeth a skirt of crimson satin that Mary had sewn herself. The French ambassador reported Elizabeth’s reaction to the French king:

The queen of Scots... is very well, and yesterday I presented on her behalf a skirt of crimson satin, worked with silver, very fine... to the Queen of England, to whom the present was very agreeable, for she found it very nice and has prized it much; and she [Elizabeth] seemed to me that I found her much softened towards her [Mary].

Mary also attempted to create connections with some of Elizabeth’s privy chamber women. In 1586 the imprisoned Scottish queen sent detailed instructions to the countess of Arundel. In them, Mary tells the countess that,

we haue also written herewith a few lines to the Ladye Cobham wherewith we likewise desire to be deliuered to her and pray you further to buye for us of the best silkes or veluett yow can finde as much as will serve to make her a cope of gownes, for the wherewith we shall remayne answerable vnto yow and this ringe enclosed we pray yow to weare for our sake...

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100 Swain 83. Although Swain writes in a way that jumps from date to date in the text, it seems that Mary gave Elizabeth the skirt at some point in 1574.
101 The letter is undated, but the HMC Hatfield III, 136, item 259, dates the letter 31 March 1586. Hatfield House, UK, Cecil MSS 164/29v.
It is unclear if the Countess of Arundel ever carried out these orders, but it is interesting that the deposed Scottish queen was sure to attach gifts to the demands she made of the countess and Lady Cobham. Although it is also unclear if these gifts ever materialized, Lady Cobham did seem to have some type of connection with Mary. In 1575, Lady Cobham was accused by Thomas Cockyn, a stationer, implicated in the 1571 Ridolfi Plot as a “favourer” of the Scottish queen.\(^\text{103}\) The extent of Lady Cobham’s involvement with the queen of Scots is unknown and the little that historians have uncovered is unclear.\(^\text{104}\) Nonetheless, what is clear is that the Scottish queen attempted on several occasions to use clothing as a means to strengthen her bond with Elizabeth, her cousin and fellow monarch, as well as to create bonds with Elizabeth’s serving women in order to better her situation.

Ultimately these attempts failed, but they do illustrate that the courtly system of sartorial gift exchange took place not only between Elizabeth and her subjects, but also between the English queen and other European royalty. In less extreme cases than those concerning the sartorial gifts of the Scottish queen to her English cousin, clothes and jewels often acted as tools of statecraft both at the domestic and the international levels.

Monarchs often bestowed upon each other membership in each kingdom’s knightly

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\(^{103}\) CSP Scotland, V, 94. The phrase ‘favourer’ comes from the quote is “what favourers the Scottish queen has in Council I know not, other than Lady Cobham.” The Ridolfi Plot involved the Duke of Norfolk and Mary, Queen of Scots getting married and together replacing Elizabeth on the throne. None of this came to pass, but resulted in the duke’s execution for treason among other things.

\(^{104}\) David McKeen in his two volume work on William Brooke, Lord Cobham is quite perplexed at why Lady Cobham would get entangled with Mary, Queen of Scots, but has found no evidence that Elizabeth ever punished Lady Cobham in any way. The only time Lady Cobham was kept from court was when her husband was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the Ridolfi plot. That is not to say that Lady Cobham’s part was completely dismissed. Indeed there seems to have been an examination of the accusations made by Cockyn against Lady Cobham, but nothing more seems to have been revealed, and as already stated Elizabeth continued to trust her and give her lavish New Year’s gifts until Lady Cobham’s death in 1592. For more on Lady Cobham and Mary, Queen of Scots see David McKeen, *A Memory of Honour: The Life of William Brooke, Lord Cobham*, [Salzburg Studies in English Literature Under the Direction of Professor Erwin A. Sturzl, Elizabethan & Renaissance Studies, Editor Dr. James Hogg] (Salzburg: Institut Fur Anglistk und Amerikanistik Universitat Salzburg, 1986), I, 318-322.
orders. Although Elizabeth could not be inducted into any of her fellow monarch’s orders, her male courtiers could be. She also continued to uphold the tradition of granting membership in the Order of the Garter to foreign rulers. This privilege and mark of esteem was sealed with gifts of the costume associated with the order. In 1564, Elizabeth commanded that the French king, who had been inducted into the Order of the Garter, receive a mantle, hood, and kirtle of different colors of velvet. The Holy Roman Emperor and the King of Denmark also received almost exactly the same set of items for the same purpose.

Maintaining good relationships between foreign powers also involved gifts, often of jewelry, to ambassadors sent to the English court. The New Year’s gift rolls, in addition to listing what the queen gave to her peers and courtiers and what she received from them, records what gifts were given to which ambassadors throughout the year. In 1563, an ambassador from Flanders, a French merchant, a French ambassador, and a messenger sent from the French Admiral were all given gifts of chains of gold. This was not a one time affair. Gold chains were distributed to the various foreign dignitaries in at least fourteen of the twenty three extant rolls. Usually these gifts of gilt plate and gold jewelry were taken from the queen’s own holdings or bought from the various goldsmiths patronized throughout the reign. However, on rare occasions, the queen had to borrow from her courtiers. In 1564, Elizabeth borrowed “Oone Coller of golde of thorder of the Garter with a George of golde” from Robert Dudley to give to the French

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105 TNA, C 115/91 f.12; Arnold, Lost, 77.
106 TNA, C 115/91 fs. 24, 81; Arnold, Lost, 34, 76.
107 Folger, Z.d.12.
108 There could be even more examples, but out of the twenty three surviving rolls, I have not yet looked at three of them. Out of the ones that I have examined, four are incomplete or very badly damaged. If the ambassadors were not given gold chains, then they were often presented with gifts of gilt plate such as the French ambassador who in 1562 received “a guilt bason and ewer and a piece of guilt pott and three guilt bowls with a cover and one guilt Salte with a cover,” recorded in BL, Harleian Roll V 18.
king, and he also contributed one bowl of gold with a cover for a French ambassadors.\footnote{Folger, Z.d.12.}

In 1588, Lady Cobham lent a chain of gold to Elizabeth who gave it to the Duke of Bullens.\footnote{BL, Additional MS 8159.} Despite the word “borrowed” used in the New Year’s gift rolls, it is unlikely that Cobham or Dudley ever saw those items again. Therefore, sometimes the queen depended upon her courtiers to help provide her with the gifts she used to forge international ties.

Although privy chamber women were less likely to provide Elizabeth directly with gifts given to foreign dignitaries, they still participated in the political sartorial system of gift-giving by taking care of these tools of government. Court women placed in charge over the jewels and clothes had an important position because they looked after items of immense monetary value as well as diplomatic importance. A book survives from Elizabeth’s reign that recorded the items the queen lost from her wardrobe, items given as gifts to courtiers, deliveries of cloth to Elizabeth’s ladies-in-waiting to make small garments like mufflers, and deliveries of new and old materials to the queen’s tailors to make garments for her use. This book in conjunction with the New Year’s gift rolls and the Wardrobe of the Robe accounts also reveal what duties and authority the privy chamber women had over the queen’s gift-giving. For example, these women had the authority to sign out and deliver royal sartorial gifts. There are multiple entries where privy chamber women signed out items to be given to other courtiers or subjects. In 1577, Dorothy Stafford and Mary Scudamore signed for “one gown of purple velvet cut all over and snipped the snipes edged w/ purled gold lined w/ cloth of silver” that was
given to Rauf Hope, Yeoman of the Wardrobe of the Robe.\textsuperscript{111} Privy chamber women clearly held the authority to help Elizabeth distribute her largesse.

In addition to being able to sign out these gifts, the privy chamber women could also deliver them. We already saw one example of this when Lady Mary Scudamore passed on the queen’s gift of a jeweled butterfly to Sir Thomas Heneage. Lady Scudamore appears to have frequently performed this duty of delivering the queen’s gifts to their recipients. The day book records an “item delievered to Mrs Mary Scudamore the $v^{th}$ of December . . . 1577 One Brouche of golde . . . Geoven by her Majestie to Mr. Pagginlanne.” Scudamore also signed out the jewel.\textsuperscript{112} A 1581 entry makes it clear that these women were following the dictates of their queen, “Given to the Lady Sheffilide and delivered by Mrs Skydamores commaundement from the Queens Matie . . . one fore part . . . .”\textsuperscript{113} In February 1576 the queen commanded that Mary Scudamore receive material to make a gown intended for her aunt, Mrs Anne Shelton.\textsuperscript{114} Elizabeth was too busy to ensure that these gifts were delivered to their recipients and relied upon her privy chamber women to get these jobs done.

Besides having the authority to deliver the queen’s gifts, they also had enough power to have their orders followed. One daybook entry for 2 April 1585 reads, “Itn dd [delivered] by the lady Staffords commaundement to [name not entered] the Lady Pawlets Sister one trayne kirtle . . . .”\textsuperscript{115} Another example in the daybook, which records the privy chamber women’s ability to take charge of the queen’s gifts, states, “Itn dd

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{111} TNA, C 115/91 f.56; Arnold, \textit{Lost}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{112} TNA, C 115/91 f.56; Arnold, \textit{Lost}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{113} TNA, C 115/91 f.76; Arnold, \textit{Lost}, 72. Nor was this an isolated case. In 1585 the daybook records, “Itn delievered by the Commandeement of Mrs Blaunch and Mrs Skidmore to Mr. Jhones the j of Maye j rownd kirtle of white tuft taffeta with ij pere of bodyes layd with a narrow lase of golde and silver to make a gowne for Mr. Harvey his daughter,” TNA, C 115/91 f.86, Arnold, \textit{Lost}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{114} TNA, C 115/91f. 51; Arnold, \textit{Lost}, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{115} TNA, C 115/91 f.85; Arnold, \textit{Lost}, 79-80.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
[delivered] by the Commandement of Mrs Blanch and Mrs Skidmore to Mr Jhones the j of Maye j round kirtle . . . to make a gowne for Mr Harvy his daughter.” In both of these examples, the privy chamber women issued orders to help get the queen’s gift to their recipients. Sometimes, as in the first example, the privy chamberers made sure the gift was delivered to the recipient. In the second case, Blanche Parry and Mary Scudamore, ordered that the round kirtle was delivered to the queen’s tailor, William Jones, to turn a garment used by the queen into a gown as a gift for Mr. Harvey’s daughter. Privy chamber women such as Mary Scudamore, Lady Dorothy Stafford, and Blanche Parry had the queen’s authority to keep the sartorial gift exchange flowing smoothly.

However, the duties the privy chamber performed may have involved even more than just delivering or implementing the queen’s gift orders. There is a unique passage in the daybook which may speak to another role the privy chamber performed within the system of sartorial gift-giving—advisors to the queen about what gift she could give to a recipient. In September 1583 “an Irish gentlewoman” was given an elaborately decorated safeguard or overskirt that protected the gown beneath it, an orange satin doublet, and a pair of ash colored satin sleeves. In the left margin it is noted, “theise things gevon by all the gentlewemens consent of the privy chamber Mrs Skudamor, Mrs Blanch, Mrs Hawks, Mrs Chaworth.” The language of this entry is striking in that it states that the privy chamber women gave their consent to the choice of this gift. Janet Arnold, a costume historian who has written extensively on Elizabeth I’s wardrobe, has posited that this entry may speak to the fact that when a garment of the queen was ready to be discarded,

\[116\] TNA, C 115/91 f. 86; Arnold, *Lost*, 80. 
\[117\] TNA, C 115/91 f.83; Arnold, *Lost*, 77.
Elizabeth may have discussed who would be the most suitable recipient of a piece of royal sartorial generosity.\textsuperscript{118} Although there are no other marginal notes that speak to the role of the privy chamber women’s consent in Elizabeth dispensing gifts from her wardrobe that could be due to the absence of other daybooks.

It is very likely that the queen turned to her privy chamberers to help her decide which of the queen’s old clothes would be given to which subject for the same reason that subjects sought them out for advice concerning gifts to give to the queen. The privy chamber women were important sources of information about suitable sartorial gifts either for the queen or from the queen, because of their intimate knowledge of the queen’s wardrobe. Again, the daybook provides valuable clues as to how much these women knew about the queen’s clothes. Some of the entries speak to the privy chamber women’s extensive knowledge of what Elizabeth wore each day. For example, there is an entry where the privy chamber women were called upon as witnesses to testify which jewels were lost and when they were last seen. Of the approximately one hundred and one entries listing the items Elizabeth lost, only two required the women to sign as witnesses, verifying what was said in the daybook’s entry. It is not clear why these two items required this extra step. One of these exceptional examples is a 1565 entry which reads,

\begin{quote}
Be it in remembraunce that upon Alhallowdaye Anno viijmo Regine Elizabeth [1565] her majestie ware a Gowne of blak vellat enbrauderid and sett with certeyne buttons of golde with diamonds, At what tyme one of the said diamonds fell from the button and was Lost off\[f\] from her highnes back. Witness hereof [Signatures] Kathryn Knollys, Blanche Pary, E Carew, Dorothee Stafford.\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{118} Arnold, \textit{The Queen’s Wardrobe Unlock’d}, 99.  
\textsuperscript{119} TNA, C 115/91 f.19; Arnold, \textit{Lost}, 30-31.
It is striking that these women were called upon as witnesses to what the queen wore when and what she had lost. Clearly, most, if not all, of the women of the privy chamber were expected to have an intimate knowledge of the queen’s apparel. If these women could remember when one of Elizabeth’s hundreds of buttons had lost a jewel, they would be excellent sources for courtiers who wanted to get the queen a thoughtful sartorial present.

The knowledge of what the queen wore each day also gave these women an authority over this national depository of dress and its accessories. This knowledge was hard earned. As the daybook, Wardrobe of the Robe warrants, and New Year’s gift rolls attest, these women were very busy attending to the queen’s sartorial needs. It would appear that some women were given very particular charges. Blanche Parry for the most part was in charge of books, the queen’s jewels, sable skins, and the deliveries of Holland cloth and fine cambric cloth. In the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, Katherine Asteley the chief gentlewoman of the privy chamber until her death in 1568, was not only in charge of various items delivered to the queen’s wardrobe, but was in charge of the clothes delivered for the Tartar child, Ipolytane. Among other duties, Lady Cobham was in charge of the material used to make the queen mufflers. Elizabeth Marbury often accepted deliveries for small garments such as smocks and knit hose, and Dorothy Broadbelt accepted the deliveries for various types of ribbons and lace among other dress related items. Many of the deliveries, however, were not specified for one person. All the women accepted deliveries for ribbons, various types of silk, wigs, brushes, combes, coffers, fans, and other articles of dress. By the end of the reign, the warrants rarely listed which deliveries went to which specific individuals. Instead there was a the general
direction that “All w[hi]ch said p[a]r[c]ells were deliuered . . . to the ladies and gentlewomen of o[u]r pryuie chamber to or vse into thoffice of o[u]r said wardrobe of robes and vnto thartificers aboue names to be employed vpon o[u]r garments aboue written.”¹²⁰ Most of the very elaborate outfits were directly delivered to one of the yeomen of the robes.¹²¹ As the various sources make clear the women of the privy chamber through their various duties would acquire detailed knowledge of the queen’s clothes and furniture.

Through such daily interaction with the queen’s clothes and clothing accessories, it becomes clear why the women of Elizabeth’s privy chamber played multiple integral roles in the courtly system of sartorial exchange. At times these women advised their friends and relatives on what to give, other times delivering the gifts to the queen in addition to them accepting the responsibility for distributing the queen’s gifts of favor to her subjects. It is very important to keep in mind the larger framework in which these gifts functioned. Since gifts of clothes functioned as capital in the political economy of the court, these women were conducting state affairs, not merely domestic tasks whenever they signed out, delivered, or received deliveries of jewels, clothes, and cloth. The importance of the courtly gift exchange whose medium was often in the form of clothing lay in its ability to forge, reinforce, and extend networks of favor that connected the queen to her subjects, even if they did not live at court.

¹²⁰ TNA, LC 5/37 p.195.
¹²¹ It appears that more than one man could hold this post at the same time, see Arnold, The Queen’s Wardrobe Unlock’d, 163-176. It is important note, however, that even if the privy chamber women were not placed in charge of these items, they would still know about these garments since they daily dressed and undressed the queen.
Dressing a Queen, Fashioning a Monarch

Gifts of dress and its accessories played another important political role—they helped to construct and extend Elizabeth’s public persona. As this chapter has already established, over her forty-five year reign, Elizabeth I received hundreds of gifts of cloth, articles of dress, and jewelry from her courtiers. There is a manuscript trail consisting of inventories, New Year’s gift rolls, and lists of what jewels were in whose custody that provides detailed information on exactly what type of clothing and accessories Queen Elizabeth I received from her subjects. Although scholars cannot with absolute certainty match jewels and garments to specific portraits, Elizabeth did receive jewels and clothing similar to those depicted in some of her state portraits. Many of the jewels and the embroidery that decorated the clothing depicted in her portraits functioned as symbols used by Elizabeth to craft her public persona. For example, in one of the more famous portraits of Elizabeth I, the so-called “Pelican portrait” painted by Nicholas Hilliard around 1575 and now at the Walker Gallery in Liverpool, an enameled jewel of a pelican hangs at the queen’s breast, symbolizing her Christ-like willingness to sacrifice herself for her subjects.122 The pelican represented Christian charity in the early modern period, because this bird was believed in times of famine to strip her own flesh in order to feed her young. This symbol was useful for Elizabeth to portray herself as a good motherly monarch who would willingly sacrifice herself for her subjects’ well-being. Although this jewel does not match any jewel given to the queen by one of her courtiers, the queen often received gifts of jewels in the form of symbols that Elizabeth appropriated to

construct her monarchical image. A few years before this portrait was painted Elizabeth received from Lady Woodhouse as a New Year’s gift, “a juell being a dyall, and a pellycane with three byrds, sett in golde with an emeralde, smale rubyes and dymondes being broken.”¹²³ The description of Lady Woodhouse’s gift reveals that through gifts courtiers could actively contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of Elizabeth’s chosen monarchical image by supplying her with symbolically resonant objects.

Historians have debated how much control Elizabeth exerted over her public image. The arguments have ranged from claims that Elizabeth was the architect of her cult to contentions that she passively allowed her male councilors to construct her image for her. Other scholars have convincingly argued that there was constant negotiation between Elizabeth and her male councilors over her image and other political policies.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, in this debate, the possible participants in the construction of Elizabeth I’s public personae have always been limited to the queen and the men who surrounded her. The New Year’s gift rolls, however, demonstrate that women too contributed to Elizabeth I’s symbolic arsenal of clothes and jewels. We have already seen how Lady Woodhouse presented Elizabeth with a pelican jewel. Another important symbol Elizabeth appropriated was that of the phoenix whose connotation of resurrection and regeneration allowed the unmarried, childless Elizabeth to calm people’s fears about the succession by proclaiming through symbols that the monarchy would not die with her.¹²⁵ In 1576, a gentlewoman by the name of Mrs Townsend gave the queen a “a Girdell of grene

¹²³ “New-yere’s Gifts charged upon Lady Howarde, 1573-4,” in Nichols, I, 380. The New Year’s gift roll to which this other list refers has not survived, so no cross-checking can be done.
¹²⁴ For example, see Susan Frye, The Competition for Representation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
¹²⁵ For further discussion of the various meanings of the phoenix symbol see Scarisbrick 62-66 and Strong (1987; 2003), 82-83; Susan Doran, entry for item “203, A Choice of Emblems and Other Devises, 1586” in Elizabeth: Exhibition, 199-200; and Tanya Cooper “The Queen’s Visual Presence,” in Elizabeth: Exhibition, 179.
S'ceonet powderid w' spangells w' a border . . . enbrauder w' a smale Ringe of golde w' a phenix in it garnished about w' a Rrose of eight Rubies.”126 It was probably not a coincidence that Mrs Townsend gave the queen a garment with the embroidered symbol of the phoenix in 1576, since it was around this time that Nicholas Hilliard painted the portrait commonly known as the “Phoenix portrait” of Elizabeth I. Both male and female courtiers/subjects were aware of the queen’s strategies of self presentation and assisted her in implementing them.

Not only did Elizabeth receive gifts that reinforced her public image, but she also gave gifts of jewels that symbolized the traits she proclaimed as hers, thus creating a circulation of symbolic jewels at court.127 For example, Elizabeth gave the 1571 New Year’s gift of an enameled red and white rose jewel that she received from Blanche Parry, chief gentlewoman of the privy chamber since 1565, to Elizabeth Howard, a woman who served the queen as a privy chamberer in the 1570s.128 This jewel was surely

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126 BL, Additional MS 4827. This manuscript was in very bad shape and hard to read. In Nichols, The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, II, 2, there is a list of all the jewels given on the New Year’s Day for 1576 that were placed in the charge of Lady Howard. The list describes Mrs Townsend’s gift as “Item, a smale ring of gold, with a phenex of ophall, and a Rrose of VIII smale rubyes.” This Mrs. Townsend may have been Jane Townshend, wife of Sir Roger Townshend, who was a courtier, MP, and client of Thomas Howard, fourth Duke of Norfolk and his son the, Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel. Although the Townshends were not implicated in any of the duke’s treasonous plots for which he was executed in 1572, it is possible that the Townsends chose their New Year’s gifts very carefully to convince Elizabeth of their loyalty to her. Both gave New Year’s gifts from 1576-1584, and so it is possible that either one or both might have held offices at court. For more information on the Townsends see Jan Broadway, “Townshend, Sir Roger,” ODNB, LV, 165-66.

127 Maria Hayward states in her article, “Gift-giving at the court of Henry VIII: the 1539 New Year's gift roll,” Antiquaries Journal 85 (2005) 128, that Henry VIII also circulated his New Year’s gifts; in 1539 Henry VIII gave one of his gifts, that of a standing cup, to the Duchess of Norfolk.

128 Merton, Appendix 1: Membership of the Privy Chamber, 262, only found documents listing her for 1577/8, but the records Merton cites often do not reflect the full tenure of a privy chamberer’s career. I would argue that Elizabeth gave one of her jewels to Elizabeth Howard, because she was at court serving the queen at this time. It is possible that she was the daughter of Charles Howard, 2nd Baron Howard of Effingham, later 1st earl of Nottingham and Katherine Carey, who was a very close friend of the queen, see Genealogical Table VI, The Howards of Effingham, in Gerald Brenan and Edward Philips Statham, The House of Howard (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1907) II, facing page 340. It is interesting that a member of the Howard family was being given a gift in 1571, after Thomas Howard, fourth Duke of Norfolk, was involved in the uprising of the Northern earls in 1569. Later in 1571 he would be arrested for participating
meant to represent the Tudor rose, a symbol of Elizabeth’s family dynasty. Such a clear English monarchical symbol would have readily signaled to Elizabeth that the giver of the gift, Parry, acknowledged the queen’s authority and wanted to help Elizabeth construct her queenly authority. Elizabeth, by giving the jewel as a gift to Howard would remind the latter privy chamberer of her loyalty to the queen and that her queen rewarded such fidelity.

In 1573, Elizabeth received a gold pelican jewel that contained rubies, diamonds and a pearl pendant that she subsequently gave away to “the younge Countyes of Huntingdone.”¹²⁹ This pelican jewel was given to Elizabeth by Lady Mary Sidney, sister to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leceister, and a woman who had served in the privy chamber without wages since the very beginning of Elizabeth’s reign.¹³⁰ This jewel with its connotation of sacrifice was especially fitting gift from Lady Sidney who had proven the depth of her devotion to Elizabeth when she had nursed the queen through a bout with small pox in 1562. This dedication proved costly both to Lady Sidney and her family; she contracted a very virulent strain which left her horribly disfigured and in a permanent

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¹²⁹ “Juells geven . . . Ladye Howarde,” in Progresses and Public Processions, I, 324. In that same year she gave away four other jewels to three people.
¹³⁰ TNA, LC2/4/3 f. 53v. I am pretty sure that this is Lady Mary Sidney, sister of Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and not her daughter, Mary Sidney who would marry Henry Herbert, 2⁰ Earl of Pembroke, since the daughter was only 12 years old at the time of this gift. Moreover, the daughter did not come to court until the following year, 1574, see Michael G. Brennan, The Sidneys of Penhurst and the Monarchy, 1500-1700 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 69.
state of poor health. As a result of her disfigurement, she rarely appeared in public, and when she did so she wore a veil or mask. Lady Sidney was also hindered in her attempts to attend court and act as a link between herself, the queen, and her family, because she was often denied suitable lodging by the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Sussex, who in spite of being her brother-in-law, was one of her brother’s most dogged opponents. Sussex, by preventing Lady Sidney from attending court, kept one of the Earl of Leicester’s proponents out of the privy chamber, and thwarted any attempt Lady Sidney could have in influencing the queen in favor of her brother’s policies. Lady Sidney’s difficulty in influencing the queen personally did not preclude her from having any influence at all. As long as the system of gift-exchange was in place at court, she had the ability to reach Elizabeth and continue to cultivate royal favor for her natal and martial families. Moreover, although Lady Sidney may not have been in constant attendance at court, she was still aware of how Elizabeth was constructing her monarchal image, and provided the queen with more material to use in its construction.

However, there may have been a more subversive intention behind Lady Mary Sidney’s gift to Elizabeth. Despite her incredible and costly devotion to her queen, Lady Sidney never received any acknowledgement from Elizabeth of her sacrifice. Instead of Elizabeth feeling gratitude towards Lady Sidney, the queen appeared to feel only embarrassment. Her family harbored a great deal of resentment towards Elizabeth’s treatment of her. Sir Philip Sidney, one of Lady Sidney’s sons and brother of Robert

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131 Brennan 38-39, 69
132 Brennan 39; Simon Adams, “Sidney [née Dudley], Mary,” ODNB, L, 555, however, believes that the extent of Lady Sidney’s deformity was exaggerated.
134 Brennan 38-39, 70.
Sidney, contracted the disease from his mother, and it too left him scarred, but not nearly to the same extent as his mother. He included his mother’s disfigurement in his *New Arcadia* through the tale of Argalas and Parthenia. According to the tale, a spurned lover of Parthenia rubbed her face with a poison that ravished her looks, but the beneficent Queen Helen tells her best doctors to restore Parthenia’s beauty, which they do. Sir Philip’s fantasy queen acts very differently than the real Elizabeth did, and thus functions as a critique of Elizabeth for not taking better care of her former servant. Therefore, Lady Mary Sidney may have given the jewel to Elizabeth as a reminder of her Christian duty to be charitable to the less fortunate. If Elizabeth wanted to use the symbol of the pelican to establish herself as a mother to her people, Lady Sidney’s gift both supported Elizabeth’s choice of imagery while simultaneously challenging Elizabeth to live up to her maternal reputation. Therefore, courtiers could participate in the construction of Elizabeth’s monarchical image, but not simply as blind supporters of the queen. Instead, these gifts had the potential to critique the queen or to remind the queen when she fell short of her own idealized image.

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136 The ability of Elizabethan subjects to use the same tropes and images as the queen in order to rebuke the queen for not living up to her idealized image has been commented upon in terms of how Elizabeth presented herself as the guardian of English Protestantism. As demonstrated in Thomas S. Freeman, “Providence and Prescription: The Account of Elizabeth in Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs,’” in Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (eds.), *The Myth of Elizabeth* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2003), 27-55, strict Protestants like John Foxe presented Elizabeth as the Protestant princess whose champion of the true religion earned her God’s protection and her right to the throne, but Foxe did it to remind Elizabeth that she only came to the throne to serve God and his true church. Foxe became disappointed with what he perceived was Elizabeth’s failure to fully reform the English Protestant church of Catholic heresies. As Freeman argues, Foxe’s subsequent editing of the different editions of his “Book of Martyrs” was to signal his disapproval of Elizabeth’s religious policies and to remind Elizabeth that she was queen to serve English Protestantism, not that her Protestantism in and of itself served to justify her rule.
This added level of subtext makes Elizabeth’s choice to give this jewel away and to whom the queen gave it even more interesting. Elizabeth chose to give Lady Sidney’s jewel to one of her sisters, the young Countess of Huntingdon, Katherine (née Dudley) Hastings. Although the Countess of Huntingdon would become a close confidante of Elizabeth’s by the end of her reign, their relationship was not always so intimate. Their relationship had undergone a period of strain shortly after Elizabeth’s bout with smallpox. Whereas Lady Mary Sidney proved her faithful service during this episode, the countess had managed to earn the queen’s resentment. At the height of Elizabeth’s fight against the disease, many thought the queen was not on her sickbed, but her deathbed. At this point in 1562 the succession was far from clear, and some put up Henry Hastings, third Earl of Huntingdon, as a candidate since he was a descendant of King Edward IV. After Elizabeth recovered from smallpox, she felt that the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon had dangerous pretensions to the throne. Consequently, Elizabeth publicly snubbed the countess at court and was slow to promote the earl to any office or give him any major responsibilities. However, by 1571 the relationship between Elizabeth and the couple had started to mend. In September 1569, the earl had been a joint custodian of Mary, Queen of Scots for three months, in 1570 he was elected as a Knight to the Garter, and by 1572 he was made President of the North. By the time New Year’s gifts were

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138 Cross 147-158. In Huntingdon’s correspondence to Cecil while he was in charge of Mary, Queen of Scots revealed that as a Protestant he was committed to keeping Mary, Queen of Scots off of the English and Scottish thrones. Although he was only in joint custody of Mary for approximately three months, in that time he proved that he would faithfully serve Elizabeth. After the 1569 uprising which took place mainly in Northern England where there were still strong Catholic sympathies, Huntingdon with his fervent Protestantism was a good choice to appoint President of the North, where he would quell Catholic resistance to Elizabeth or support for Mary.
exchanged in 1573, Elizabeth appeared to have her faith restored in the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon.

Therefore, perhaps Elizabeth gave the gift of the pelican to the countess of Huntington to reinforce the newly mended bond between the Huntingdons and the queen. The jewel of the pelican, with its connotation of sacrifice and Christian charity may have had special meaning to countess and earl who were fervent Protestants. The symbolic jewel may also have been Elizabeth’s subtle reminder of what she asked of her faithful followers—sacrifice. This message would have been clear to the countess who definitely knew of her sister’s sacrifice and must have known that her sister originally gave this to the queen as a New Year’s gift. Elizabeth may have given Lady Sidney’s jewel to the countess to remind and inspire in her the same self-sacrificing faithfulness that her sister embodied. The queen may have also used this jewel to show her pleasure with the earl’s performance in his new posts which were strengthening the queen’s position in the tumultuous north of the country. Such an important symbol of Elizabeth’s queenship may have also been to remind the Huntingdons that their status and power were tied directly to Elizabeth’s. As fervent Protestants, they would not be able to stomach the thought of a Catholic uprising in the north of England whose goal would be to place the Catholic Mary Stewart on the English throne and restoring Catholicism to England. Lastly, by passing on Lady Sidney’s jewel, Elizabeth may have been able to dilute the subversive potential of the gift. Instead of the jewel reminding Elizabeth of a mistreated servant’s sacrifice, she could use it as a tool to ensure sacrifice and faithful service from other courtiers.\[139\]

\[139\] The Earl and Countess of Huntingdon never seemed to have harbored any resentment over Elizabeth’s treatment of the countess’ sister.
Elizabeth did not just use gifts of jewels and clothes to create bonds between herself and her female subjects. One of the most famous gifts Elizabeth gave is now referred to as the “Drake Jewel.” The jewel, given by Elizabeth I to Sir Francis Drake, is a locket that contains a miniature of the queen and a phoenix is painted on the inside of the lid. The cover of the jewel contains a cameo of a black prince and a white princess that is framed in a gold and enameled scrolled border decorated with rubies and diamonds. The final touch is the cluster of pearls that hang below. This locket combines numerous symbols: pearls to denote chastity and majesty, the queen’s image of eternal youth, the phoenix, and the front cameo depicting an African man and a white woman, which Karen C.C. Dalton has argued is a proud declaration of England as a colonial empire. By giving this gift to Drake, Elizabeth not only asserts her image of the chaste queen of a nation asserting imperial and colonial aspirations, but is able to acknowledge, and thus, bind Drake to this mission. This jewel was both a reward for past service and an incentive to push for future naval successes. Drake would now feel invested in promoting the crown’s maritime agenda. Clearly Drake felt that this mark of royal favor was important to the fashioning of his own image since he wore this jewel in a portrait dated 1594.

Scarisbrick, 84-85; Karen C.C. Dalton, “Art for the Sake of Dynasty: The Black Emperor in the Drake Jewel and Elizabethan Imperial Imagery,” in Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (eds.), *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 178-214; Strong (1987), 121, posits that Elizabeth gave Drake this jewel in 1586-7 and that it was in vogue for male courtiers to wear cameos/miniatures of the queen in their portraits. Drake was only one member to receive such a jewel. Thomas Heanage was presented with a locket containing the queen’s miniature that has come to be called “The Armada Jewel,” see Diana Scarisbrick, entry for item “250, The Armada Jewel, second half of the sixteenth century,” in *Elizabeth: Exhibition*, 239-40. The claim that England was a colonial empire by 1584 might seem a bit over inflated, but it was often part of the propaganda of Elizabeth’s portraiture, see Andrew Bellsey and Catherine Bellsey, “Icons of Divinity: Portraits of Elizabeth I,” in Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (eds.), *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c.1540-1660* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 31-58.

These three examples of Elizabeth giving away gifts to Elizabeth Howard, the Countess of Huntingdon, and Sir Francis Drake, speak to the additional role gifts played in creating or maintaining bonds between the queen and her subjects. Gifts from the queen could also remind their recipients that they were invested in the creation of Elizabeth’s monarchical image and her power. This additional power of sartorial gifts is especially important when examining the gifts Elizabeth received, but then gave away. It is unlikely that Elizabeth gave away her jewels because she was displeased with them, since they were the symbols, in jewel-form, that Elizabeth used to bolster her monarchical image. Instead the queen’s action testifies to the larger purpose of the courtly system of gift exchange that often centered on dress and its accessories. Just as courtiers could use symbolic jewelry or colored garments to signal to Elizabeth that they would be useful allies in the creation of her public personae, Elizabeth could further reinforce the notion that she needed her subjects to help her in this enterprise.

This circulation of “majestic capital” reveals that clothing acted as more than just a majestic backdrop in front of which the role of monarch was performed. The New Year’s gift rolls and other documents testify that both men and women participated in this system of gift exchange and that the queen recognized and encouraged equally her female and her male subjects in this collaborative enterprise of fashioning the royal image. Thus, courtiers provided more than the audience, but were also the actors and props needed for the monarch’s display of his or her sovereignty. This chapter’s examination of the courtly gift exchange of fabric, garments, and dress accessories, and the role of women within it commenced with an episode from the downfall of the Earl of Essex. Whereas the attempts made by Essex, his mother, and his sisters to use gifts, and often sartorial gifts,
to repair the earl’s damaged link to the queen are documented in letters, there is a more apocryphal anecdote involving Elizabeth, Essex, and the gift of a ring, which is also illuminating. As far as the historical record attests, Essex and his family were not able to rehabilitate his relationship with the queen, and Essex came to believe that the only way to save his financial, political, and social position was to revolt against the queen in 1601. The revolt failed, and Essex was condemned to death and executed for treason. A legend arose in the seventeenth century that Essex’s fall and death were the result of Essex’s enemies tricking a reluctant and lovesick Elizabeth into seeing the earl’s execution through. This legend was fully articulated in *The Secret History of the most renowned Q. Elizabeth and the E. of Essex*, which was originally published in French in 1678, but eventually published in English in 1680.\(^{142}\) A central premise of this myth revolved around a ring that Elizabeth gave to the earl before his departure for Ireland, where Elizabeth tells Essex,

> Take This, (said I, delivering him a Ring, as the highest Mark of My Favour) keep it as a Pledge of My Kindness; which I conjure you to preserve in the State it is in: And on that condition, I promise you, never to deny you any thing you shall desire of Me, when you shew Me this Ring, though it cost Me My Life, and My Fortune.\(^{143}\)

In this excerpt, Elizabeth gives Essex a ring to take with him into Ireland as a tangible piece of evidence of her favor towards him. This ring, although a piece of fiction, works in the same way that the butterfly jewel did in the Heneage example. Both male favorites are about to depart the court to carry out Elizabeth’s business. She gives them a gift of jewelry to remind them of her favor towards them as well as to protect the courtier from

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143 *The Secret History of the most renowned Q. Elizabeth and E. of Essex by a Person of Quality* (Cologne, 1680), Part I, 44-45.
any future troubles. In the case of Heneage, he had first given the queen a jewel that
Elizabeth promised to wear near her ear so that the jewel could block any slander said
against him while he was away. In the case of Essex and the ring, if the earl found
himself in trouble, he could return the ring to Elizabeth who would deny him nothing.

At this point, Essex seemed to be safely in the affection of the queen. However, in
*The Secret History*, we learn that there are two courtiers machinating against Essex, the
Countess of Nottingham and her lover, Robert Cecil. The countess hated Essex for
spurning her love, whereas Cecil resented Essex, “as the invincible Obstacle of his
[Cecil’s] ambitious Pretensions.”\(^{144}\) Essex’s failure in Ireland and his secret marriage
gives the pair the opportunity to harden the heart of the queen against Essex, to bring him
to trial for treason, and then to ensure his execution. Elizabeth oscillates between
forgiving Essex and carrying out his death sentence. Every time the queen is about to
relent, the Countess of Nottingham, with Cecil’s support, convinces the queen to stay the
course. The countess explains to Cecil, and thus the reader, her ability to influence the
queen, “I have the Queens Ear: I know how to speak; I am not suspected; nor am I a
stranger to the Secrets of the One, nor the Other.”\(^{145}\) The countess’ power exists in her
close relationship to Elizabeth, who only regards the countess as a friend. From the
beginning of the tale, the queen has intimated to the countess that she is deeply in love
with Essex, and the countess uses the queen’s hurt pride to ensure that Essex is executed.

The idea that the privy chamber women would use their close proximity to the
queen to put forward either their own suits or those of other people to the queen was not
one confined to romances about Elizabeth’s court. As demonstrated in chapter one,

\(^{144}\) *The Secret History*, Part II, 48 for the quote, see 46-48 for the explanation of the countess’ spurned
pursuit of the Earl of Essex.

\(^{145}\) *The Secret History*, Part II, 44.
courtiers often tried to use the privy chamber women to actively help them press their suits to the queen, even in cases where clothing was not directly involved. Many subjects and courtiers believed that the people who spent time with the queen, including the female privy chamberers and friends of the queen, could influence the queen, a belief reflected in the character of the Countess of Nottingham in *The Secret History*, who claimed that to “have the Queens Ear” would enable her and Cecil to persuade Elizabeth to execute Essex.

The countess’ and Cecil’s only fear is that Essex might return the ring to Elizabeth, who will fulfill her promise and pardon him. Essex does decide to implore the queen for pardon by returning to her the ring, but in the Tower he is unable to give the ring directly to Elizabeth. In need of a go-between, the earl,

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knowing the Countess of Nottingham was Her Favourite and Confident; though he had Cause to believe she had no great Kindness for him, he was perswaded, she might have Generosity enough to serve him in this important Mediation.  
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Unfortunately, the earl could not have picked a worse person for the job, and the treacherous countess gives the ring to Cecil instead of the queen. Elizabeth, believing that Essex has refused to ask for succor, does not stay the execution. Although Elizabeth had allowed the execution to take place, “she languish’d out the rest of Her Life: The only Comfort she had, was to think the Earl of Essex, had slighted Her to his Death.”

This small comfort that Elizabeth clung to was snatched away by the Countess of Nottingham, who on her deathbed, repented of her treachery and confessed her crime to the queen. Elizabeth responded, “Wretch . . . What Remorse hast thou expos’d Me to! Where

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146 *The Secret History*, Part II, 51.
147 *The Secret History*, Part II, 59.
Heaven will Pardon thy Crimes, I know not; sure I am, I shall never forget them.”

Shortly after learning the truth behind Essex’s execution, Elizabeth too dies.

Although this story is the invention of the seventeenth century, there are kernels of historical truth in it. As Paul E.J. Hammer has posited, this story does reveal important aspects of late Elizabethan politics and political culture: that Essex refused to beg for clemency after his trial and death sentence, that Essex and Robert Cecil were considered implacable enemies after 1595, that the Countess of Nottingham and the queen were very close and the former’s death did seem to hasten the latter’s, and that it was common practice in Tudor politics to give rings as a sign of favor and protection. I would argue that there is another important aspect of Tudor politics that is revealed in this story: the role women played in court politics, particularly in terms of the circulation of gifts relating to dress. In this story, we once again see female courtiers acting as “middlewomen” to help courtiers and non-courtiers alike participate in the courtly sartorial system of gift exchange. The countess’ close physical proximity to the queen and her daily service upon Elizabeth placed Lady Nottingham in a prime position to influence the queen. Essex also believed that the countess, due to her intimacy with the queen, would be able to act as a bridge to connect him to the queen. By refusing to take on this role of sartorial broker, the countess had the power to disrupt the flow of political currency, which would have allowed Essex to redeem himself and start rebuilding his relationship with the queen.

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148 The Secret History, Part II, 60.
Even though this is a fictional account, the historical record does demonstrate that women often acted as brokers, consultants, recipients, and givers of gifts in the system of sartorial gift exchange. Power at court was something that was constantly being created, maintained, augmented, eroded, and negotiated. Cloth, garments, and jewelry were political capital that could be used in multiple ways at the Elizabethan court. Rich clothes and multitudes of jewels were important materials used to construct monarchical splendor and spectacle. In an age that demanded to see a person’s social status and power, clothing stated in not so subtle terms where one existed in the social hierarchy. Monarchs not only dressed lavishly, but ensured that those who attended court also dressed in such a way that visually declared their membership in the royal household. Often the queen enabled the members of her court and royal household to sartorially demonstrate their position with gifts of clothes, sometimes in the form of livery. Whether it was livery, a gift of a new outfit, or a gift of the queen’s old garments, clothing built networks and identified members of networks that extended to and included the queen. Subjects too could use gifts related to dress as an attempt to build a connection to the queen, which might enable them to influence the queen to reward them, their families, and their clients.

Elizabeth I and her subjects also realized that gifts of dress and jewels to the queen could help her construct her political persona. As the queen gave gifts to her subjects, received gifts, wore these gifts, or gave away her gifts, her public image, which was directly connected to her monarchical authority, was being both constructed and extended in two important ways. By bestowing gifts that contained symbols of her authority and persona, such as a pelican jewel or a Tudor rose, to people not at court,
Elizabeth could establish her monarchical image outside the court. If the gift was to someone at court, it was often a means to remind the recipient of their vested interest in the queen ruling successfully, because their powerful court position rested upon Elizabeth remaining in power. By accepting gifts from those not at court, Elizabeth was also instilling in her non-courtier subjects a sense that they too were an important part of Elizabeth’s success as a ruler. Monarchical splendor did not simply stun her subjects into submission, but by its very nature bound subject to ruler because it was a joint enterprise. The ability of courtiers to participate in the fashioning of the queen’s monarchical image did not mean they blindly supported and contributed to this exercise. As seen with the example of the jewel given by Lady Mary Sidney, these gifts could also challenge or criticize Elizabeth and her public persona.

However, to ensure that the circulation of gifts did not cease, Elizabeth and her subjects often needed help, and it was female courtiers, especially the privy chamber women, who provided the necessary aid. Female courtiers advised subjects (and possibly the queen) on what to give, they delivered gifts to the queen and from the queen, and they wrote to gift givers if the gift was well received. The privy chamber women in particular had valuable knowledge about the queen’s size, personal preference, and the contents of the royal wardrobe. Their knowledge and their constant presence around the queen enabled them to actively participate in the system of gift exchange at Elizabeth’s court. Moreover, the exchange of sartorial gifts was an important political process through which power, rewards, and political networks were forged and perpetuated both in the domestic and international spheres. Since gifts of clothes functioned as capital in the political economy of court, these women were conducting state affairs, not merely
domestic tasks whenever they signed out, delivered, or received deliveries of jewels, clothes, and cloth. The women involved in the system of gift exchange at court were actively participating in building and maintaining the network of support Queen Elizabeth I required to survive on the throne. Scholars who depict the Elizabethan privy chamber as apolitical, merely a domestic space devoid of any political maneuvering, ignore the political implications of clothes, their meanings, and their circulation. These items were more than just passive props used to impress subjects and foreign princes, rather they were kept, worn, and distributed to forge and perpetuate connections between the queen and her subjects and to bind England’s monarchy to other European rulers. Subjects and monarchs understood the courtly system of sartorial gift-giving as a means of earning favor to further family, individual, or other group interests. By dressing the queen, subjects played a significant role in fashioning the monarchy.
Chapter 3
Queenly Bodies: Elizabeth’s Female Courtiers and the Construction of Queenship

Elizabeth I died in the early hours of 24 March 1603 at her Richmond palace. Later that day the Privy Council declared King James VI of Scotland, great-great-grandson of Henry VII, as Elizabeth’s successor to the throne. \(^1\) Elizabeth’s death, however, did not immediately release her privy chamber women or any of her courtiers and officials from their service obligations to her. The transfer of power from a monarch to his or her successor was not complete until the deceased monarch had been buried. Preparing for a royal funeral was not something that could be done hastily; Elizabeth’s funeral did not take place until 28 April 1603. As discussed in chapter two, funerals were sponsored by the state to visually portray the majesty of monarchy and required a great deal of time to be organized. Every aspect of a royal funeral or the funeral of an aristocrat was controlled by the College of Arms, which regulated and tracked what noble titles were held by which families. These funerals were public events meant to both illustrate and reinforce early modern England’s social hierarchy. \(^2\)

Royal funerary ritual did differ in some small respects from the funeral program followed for an aristocrat, because royal funerals also served to give visual expression to the early modern political theory of the monarch’s two bodies. This theory understood the office of the monarch to be comprised of two parts: the body politic, which was the abstract and eternal part of the office, and the body natural, which was the actual human

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\(^1\) SP 14/1/1r-2v, which according to CSPD, VIII, 1 is dated 24 March 1603; John Clapham, *Elizabeth of England: Certain Observations Concerning the Life and Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, eds., Evelyn Plummer Read and Conyers Read (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), 103, also states the Privy Council declared James king the same day Elizabeth died.

who inhabited the office and could transmit this office to another individual. According to Edmund Plowden, a sixteenth-century jurist, “the Body natural and the Body politic are not distinct, but united, and as one body” in the figure of the monarch. The only time these two bodies separated was upon the death of the natural body of the monarch, when the body politic was then transferred to another body natural. As stated by the Privy Council, the body politic had been transferred to the body natural of King James VI of Scotland. Although James and his wife started to make their way south from Scotland to London, he would not officially enter London until his coronation. James could not officially assume the throne until Elizabeth was buried, because theoretically, there could not be two “natural” bodies inhabiting the “political” body.

James’ absence affected the organization of the royal funeral. Arguably the most important aspect of a royal funeral was the public procession of nobles and members of the deceased monarch’s royal household that accompanied the corpse to its burial place. The chariot carrying the queen’s coffin to the church was closer to the back of the procession. Each of the funeral mourners’ ranks, from the humblest royal household servant to the highest peer, was visibly marked by their position in the procession: those at the front and furthest away from the coffin were of humbler rank than those closest to

3 Ernst Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997); Marie Axton, The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and Elizabethan Succession (London: The Royal Historical Society, 1977). However, it is important to note that the monarch’s two bodies theory was used or accepted by everyone in sixteenth-century England, Carole Levin, ‘The Heart and Stomach of a King’: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 122.

4 Edmund Plowden, Commentaries or Reports (London, 1816), 212a as cited in Kantorowicz 12.

5 Plowden (223a, as quoted in Kantorowicz 13) explains, “The king has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one . . . a Body natural, consisting of Natural Members . . . [which] is subject to . . . Death . . . the other is a Body politic . . . never dies, and his natural Death is not called . . . the Death of the King . . . [and signifies] that there is a Separation of the two Bodies, and that the Body politic is transferred . . . to another Body natural.”

6 Kantorowicz 429; Roger Laurence Mitchels, “‘In the Midst of Life,’: The Aristocratic Funeral Ceremony in Early Modern England, 1450-1700,” (Ph.D dissertation, Northwestern University, 1979) 33; Woodward 94.
Society’s hierarchy was thus visually reproduced and reinforced. The chief mourner was usually the heir of the deceased, but various customs had evolved in the royal funerary ritual which precluded James’ ability to perform that role. Custom dictated that the new monarch did not make a public royal entrance until their predecessor had been buried to ensure that the final respects owed to the defunct ruler were properly paid. Courtiers and subjects would not be able to fulfill their final duties to Elizabeth if they were busy trying to attend to James, the new monarch. On a more basic level, James was barred from acting as Elizabeth’s chief mourner, because funerary ritual required that the chief mourner be of the same sex as the deceased, and in the case of a monarch’s funeral, preferably an immediate relative of the royal family or the highest ranking peer. At the time of Elizabeth’s death, the chief mourner should have been Lady Arbella Stuart, a relative of both the Tudor and Stuart families, but she had often fought with the late queen and refused the role. According to John Clapham’s manuscript history of Elizabeth’s reign, Certain Observations Concerning the Life and Reign of Queen Elizabeth, written shortly after the queen’s death, “The Lady Arbella Stuart, being of royal blood, was especially required to have honored the funeral with her presence, which she refused, saying that sith her access to the Queen in her lifetime might not be permitted, she would not after her death be brought upon the stage for a public

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7 Woodward 17.
8 Mitchels 73, 77.
9 Woodward 98. Woodward 96-100 discusses various reasons why custom dictated that the new monarch could not make his/her royal entry until the defunct monarch had been buried.
10 There are various sources which state that originally Arbella Stuart was supposed to be the chief mourner at Elizabeth’s funeral, for example see CSP, Venetian, X, 10 and a letter dated 12 April 1603, John Chamberlain to Dudley Carlton in Elizabeth McClure Thompson (ed.), The Chamberlain Letters: a selection of the letters of John Chamberlain concerning life in England from 1597 to 1626, in Elizabeth McClure Thomson, (ed.), (London: John Murray, 1965), 25.
Instead, this important role was assumed by one of Elizabeth’s closest friends, a gentlewoman of the privy chamber, Helena Gorges, Marchioness of Northampton; however, she did not receive this position due to her close relationship to the queen, but because she was the next highest ranking noblewoman after Arbella. The Marchioness of Northampton’s special role in the funeral procession was signified by her position directly behind the chariot carrying the coffin.

The chariot containing the coffin served as a very important focal point in the funeral procession because it carried both the defunct body natural of Elizabeth, and the body politic of Elizabeth represented by a carved wooden effigy. John Clapham’s manuscript history and a series of color drawings which visually recorded the funeral procession all describe the chariot and effigy, and reveal that the face of the queen’s effigy had its eyes painted open to represent the queen as alive. Elizabeth’s effigy was not innovative in this respect; the effigies of Henry VII, Mary I, and Anne of Denmark, among other surviving royal effigies, are all carved with the eyes open. Depicting the effigy as alive makes sense in light of the vocabulary used to describe it. Clapham called it an “image,” whereas the funeral account book referred to it as a “royal representac[ion].” The effigy was in fact an image, not just of the specific natural body of Elizabeth, but of the general body politic of the English monarchy. The juxtaposition of the effigy of the living monarch on top of the coffin with the corpse of the defunct

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11 Clapham 114; Arbella’s absence was also noted by Scaramelli in CSP, Venetian X, 24. See Appendix I for the Tudor-Stuart Family Tree.
13 Woodward’s book includes photographs of the effigies of Anne of Bohemia, Henry VII, Mary I, and Anne of Denmark, (figures 12-14) all of which depict the defunct with open eyes.
14 TNA, LC 2/4/4 f.11v. In this specific entry, William Jones, a tailor, was paid to make the “Robe of Satten crymsin for the Royal Representacon . . . .”
monarch within visually declared that although the queen was dead, the royal office of monarchy had not died with her.

Arbella Stuart’s refusal to let her physical body be incorporated in this public reaffirmation and representation of the abstract body politic is a telling one. Most of the scholarship analyzing how the monarch’s two bodies theory functioned in the reign of Elizabeth has focused upon how she and her government manipulated the theory to justify something considered to be unacceptable in the sixteenth century—a female monarch.\textsuperscript{15} Elizabeth, like her half-sister Mary before her, argued that her female body natural did not preclude her from holding the political office of monarch which was considered not only eternal, but also male.\textsuperscript{16} The argument for this once again rested in Plowden who explained that although the body natural of a monarch might suffer some sort of “defect” like infancy or senility, the body politic “is utterly void of . . . natural Defects and Imbecilities which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause what the King does in his Body politic cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural body.”\textsuperscript{17} In the case of Elizabeth (and Mary), her body natural’s defect was its sex, which in the minds of many sixteenth-century people was a very dangerous defect but, according to the logic laid out by Plowden, not something that affected the body politic. As concluded by some of Elizabeth’s contemporaries and by some of her future

\textsuperscript{15} Levin 121-148.

\textsuperscript{16} Charles Beem, \textit{The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History} (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 2, 63-64; Constance Jordan, \textit{Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models} (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 128-129. Judith M. Richards, “Mary Tudor as ‘Sole Quene’?: Gendering Monarchy,” \textit{The Historical Journal} 40:4 (1997), 895, 904 does not utilize Plowden and the theory of the monarch’s two bodies theory in her analysis of how England struggled to come to terms with Mary I as a queen regnant, but Richards does agree with other scholars that the office of monarch was conceived as a masculine one.

\textsuperscript{17} Plowden 213 as cited in Axton 17; Kantorowicz 7 also quotes this section from Plowden, but attributes it to another page 212a.
historians, Elizabeth I was a monarch with a masculine body politic and a feminine body natural.  

However, Arbella’s refusal complicates historians’ understanding of early modern monarchy in general and of queenship in particular. Elizabeth’s and Arbella’s relationship with each other had broken down long before Elizabeth had died. The queen had always viewed Arbella with suspicion, as the latter was a royal relative of both Elizabeth Tudor, Queen of England and James Stuart, King of Scotland. Elizabeth tried to regulate the bodies of her royal relatives often by controlling whether or not they could marry, since any resulting offspring could affect the succession. The queen knew that if Arbella married another person with strong claims to the throne, this young woman might be used to depose Elizabeth who was increasingly losing her courtiers’ favor in the 1590s.  

In 1602 Arbella tried and failed to circumvent the queen’s control and contract a marriage to another claimant to the English throne, which resulted in her interrogation by the queen’s officials and her continued exile at her grandmother’s house in northern England.

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18 Some examples of such scholarship are Levin 121-124; Jordan in both her book, Renaissance Feminism, 131, and her article, “Woman’s Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought,” Renaissance Quarterly 40:3 (1987), 439, claims that John Aylmer’s defense of Elizabeth’s ability to assume the masculine office despite her female body laid out in his 1559 Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes, implicitly rests upon the theory of the monarch’s two bodies. For example, Aylmer (C4v) argues that a married female ruler could hold both the office of wife and magistrate, “so farre as perteineth to the bandes of marriage, and the office of a wife, she muste be a subiecte: but as a Magistrate she maye be her husbands head.” Beem 63-64 discusses how the monarch’s two bodies theory was applied in the context of Mary I to justify her inheritance of the office of monarch.

The struggle between Elizabeth and Arbella over the latter’s ability to marry reveals why Arbella refused to participate in Elizabeth’s funeral. In a sense, Arbella refused to allow her body to be appropriated for a spectacle that allowed Elizabeth I to extend her royal presence one last time, because Elizabeth had for too long tried to regulate Arbella’s body and keep it from appropriating Elizabeth’s body politic. Arbella, however, was only one of the women whose bodies and reproductive capabilities Elizabeth tried to control.

Elizabeth’s right to rule was challenged by her female body, the bodies of other female claimants to the throne, and the bodies of the women who surrounded the queen. Arbella’s and Elizabeth’s strained relationship reveals that the women who surrounded the queen could either limit or, as I shall explain further on, extend Elizabeth’s use of her body natural and her body politic. Thus far, most scholars have applied the analytical category of gender to the political theory of the monarch’s two bodies to determine how it shaped Elizabeth’s justification of her rule. They have paid less attention to how Elizabeth’s gender may have allowed other women an opportunity to participate in the construction of Elizabeth’s queenship or the representation of her body politic.21 Historians have explored how the political theory of the monarch’s two bodies was used to construct one specific woman’s—a queen regnant’s—relationship to the body politic, but not how this same theory might have shaped the relationship between the queen and her female courtiers. I, however, want to extend the possibility of political agency to court women who had no claims to the throne, but had a politicized set of relationships.

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with Elizabeth’s natural body. Elizabeth’s female courtiers had a political role at court because of their close relationship with the queen; they could be appropriated into, augment, or extend Elizabeth’s body politic. Conversely, these women could also use their bodies and their knowledge about Elizabeth’s body to challenge the queen’s monarchical authority.

The functions performed by the women who surrounded Elizabeth as her privy chamber women and female courtiers reveal that the historical paradigm of the monarch’s two bodies is much more complicated than hitherto understood. Often a monarch needed other “natural” bodies to represent his/her “body politic.” For example, just like male monarchs, Elizabeth sent men as ambassadors to represent her at foreign courts. At home, however, Elizabeth’s body natural was taken care of by women, and the duties performed by these women provided them with opportunities to construct, protect, extend and challenge Elizabeth’s monarchical body. The privy chamber women’s primary responsibilities revolved around dressing and taking care of Elizabeth’s bodily needs, and required that these women stay in close physical proximity to the queen, a proximity, which endowed the queen’s female attendants with status and influence at the very center of power.22

The special status of these women, as this chapter will argue, allowed Elizabeth to appropriate the bodies of her women for the political function of extending her royal presence outside the physical space where the queen resided. One of the tools that permitted Elizabeth’s female courtiers to act as queenly surrogates was clothing; the queen exempted her serving women from sumptuary legislation which allowed them to dress above their social station. Chapter two demonstrated that Elizabeth and her subjects often used gifts of dress and dress accessories to construct Elizabeth’s monarchical image and to build ties of loyalty that bound together the queen and her subjects. Clothing also provided the means through which Elizabeth could both appropriate the bodies of her women for her own political advantages and visibly demarcate the special status of her female courtiers. This special relationship and its privileges also created tension between the queen and her uniquely empowered servants. Sometimes, as in the case of Arbella Stuart, Elizabethan female aristocrats, courtiers, and privy chamberers, used their bodies (or refused to let their bodies be used) to disrupt Elizabeth’s ability to extend her royal presence.

**Chaste-izing the Queen**

Often, this struggle played itself out in fights between the queen and her female courtiers over clothes, sex, and marriage. Elizabeth had been, in part, successful in preventing Arbella Stuart from marrying because the queen had been able to exile Arbella away from court inhabited by innumerable potential suitors. In the case of the privy chamber women, whose very position placed them at court, Elizabeth often found it
much more difficult to control their bodies. Many biographies of Elizabeth are peppered with anecdotes about the queen and her women fighting over the affections of Elizabeth’s male courtiers; and these stories are typically used to highlight the single queen’s alleged sexual jealousy of her courtiers’ ability to marry. Understanding these fights in terms of sexual rivalry and female vanity, however, unnecessarily limits the roles clothing, bodies, and sex played in constructing Elizabeth’s identity as queen and the methods at her disposal to exert her royal authority. For example, one Mr. Fenton wrote to John Harington, a godson of Elizabeth, in a much quoted letter dated 23 May 1597 that the queen was very upset with the behavior of one of her maids of honor, Lady Mary Howard.  

According to the letter, Howard had refused to bear the queen’s mantle when Elizabeth wanted to go walking in the garden, had refused to bear the queen’s cup during dinner, had spoken back to the queen when Elizabeth had rebuked her, and had refused to attend upon the queen when the latter went to pray. Fenton also explained that Elizabeth was further irritated with her maid of honor for flirting with one of the queen’s male favorites, Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex.

Clothing played an important role in the drama between Elizabeth and her recalcitrant maid of honor. Lady Howard spurned her royal mistress’ authority when she refused to carry Elizabeth’s mantle. The way in which Howard dressed and the perceived

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23 Violet Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth’s Maids of Honor and Ladies of the Privy Chamber* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1923), 211-216, draws this episode (and the one Harrington recalls later) to demonstrate Elizabeth’s inability to tolerate sexual rivals for the attention of her male favourites; Many others follow Wilson’s example, Anne Somerset, *Ladies-in-Waiting: From the Tudors to the Present Day* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1984), 92; Haigh 101-103, only quotes a phrase from Harington’s letter, but he places it in a different context. Haigh portrays Elizabeth as jealous, emotional, and ill-tempered, but he does link her fits of anger and jealousy to politics. However, Haigh does all of this to demonstrate how Elizabeth cowed her female attendants into submission with her anger which allowed the queen to control them. McManus, “Reading the Margins,” 40-41, quotes the Fenton and Harington letters, but gives a much more complex reading of the queen’s troubles with Lady Mary Howard.

reason why she chose her clothes also exacerbated the situation. The sumptuous dresses Lady Howard wore “more to win the earle than her mistresses good will” were part of her defiance against the queen. One dress in particular, a velvet one decorated with “golde and pearle,” outraged the queen to the point that, as Harington would reminisce in a 1606 letter,

One daye the Queene did sende privately, and got the ladies rich vesture, which she put on herself, and came forthe the chamber among the ladies; the kirtle and border was far too shorte for her Majesties heigth; and she askede every one, ‘How they likede her new fancies suit?’ At length, she askede the owner herself, ‘If it was not made too short and ill-becoming?’—which the poor ladie did presentlie consent to. ‘Why then, if it become not me, as being too shorte, I am minded it shall never become thee, as being too fine; so it fitted neither well.’ The sharp rebuke abashed the ladie, and she never adorned herewith anymore. I believe the vestment was laid up till after the Queene death.25

Harington told this particular story to demonstrate Elizabeth’s love of clothes and her irritation when others dressed above their station.26 However, as I will argue later, the queen was not as concerned about her female attendants dressing above their rank as using their clothes to challenge her sartorial preeminence which was tied to her monarchical authority.

More recent scholarship has connected courtiers’ sexual rebellion with political challenges to Elizabeth’s reign.27 When Elizabeth’s male and female courtiers disregarded their queen’s authority over how to use their bodies, they were undermining Elizabeth’s basic claim to govern at all. Most people in early modern Europe believed that women were incapable of governing, because they were too weak to control their

25 Letter from Sir John Harington to Mr. Robert Markham, 1606 in *Nugae Antiquae*, I, 361-362. Although this was written in 1606, most scholars accept that this is related to the Lady Mary Howard incident of 1597.

26 According to Harrington, *Nugae Antiquae*, I, 361, Elizabeth I “did love riche cloathynge, but often chid those that bought more finery than became their state.”

27 McManus 31-58; Hammer, “Sex and the Virgin Queen,” 77-98.
own bodily desires, let alone command the authority to govern over other bodies. Women’s virtue rested upon their modesty and chastity, which according to John Knox’s tract against female rule “she loseth whensouer she taketh upon her the office and estate of ma[n].” Knox further explained that women by their very nature were “weake, fraile, impacie[n]t, feble and folishe . . . vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regime[n]t.” Power corrupted women; when women usurped the power divinely and naturally accorded to men, they broke free from the patriarchal restraints upon women’s sexuality, treachery, and avarice. Women rulers could only be tyrants and whores, equals to the notorious Biblical example of Jezebel, who was guilty of adultery, tyranny, and idolatry (among other crimes). Knox, however, was not first person to equate queen regnants with moral decay; Thomas Beacon in his 1554 tract, *An Humble Suplication vnto God*, declared that “quenes were for the moste part wicked, ungodly, superstitious, [and] geue[n] to idolatry [and] to al filthy abhominacio[n]s; as we may se in . . . queen Jesebel.” Furthermore, at least in Knox’s eyes, no woman, even those of royal blood, were exempt from these imperfections. Therefore, if Elizabeth’s court was a place where “filthy abominacions,” like fornication, regularly took place, she would prove her detractors correct that all women were incapable of ruling successfully and virtuously.

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29 Knox 10v.
30 Knox 38v-39v.
31 Thomas Becon, *An Humble Supplicacion Vnto God* (Strasburgh, 1554), unpaginated.
32 Knox 25v “Because in the nature of all women, lurketh such vices, as in good gouernors are not tolerable.”
33 Hammer, “Sex and the Virgin Queen,” 82-83. As Constance Jordan in *Renaissance Feminism* (and many other scholars have) has demonstrated, women’s rule both in the home and on the throne was considered an abomination against the laws of God and nature, because women’s weak nature demanded
Thus, it was not just Elizabeth’s behavior that demonstrated her fitness to rule, but the behavior of her courtiers mattered too. If young men and women were having sex outside of marriage at court, it was because Elizabeth, a spiritually and physically weak woman, was incapable of governing her royal household and/or she had given into her natural, uncontrollable sexuality, making her court and her country a den of iniquity. Elizabeth needed to demonstrate control over her natural body and the bodies of her courtiers to legitimate her authority over the body politic. Although it is very important to see that court women, by refusing to allow Elizabeth to control their bodies, could challenge their queen’s authority, this sets up female courtly power as primarily a negative force—that court women could only use their bodies to gain power at Elizabeth’s expense. I think we can acquire a more nuanced understanding of the sexual politics at the Elizabethan court by fleshing out the role female courtiers’ bodies played in the construction and extension of Elizabeth’s royal authority. Understanding the contests over clothes and sex at Elizabeth’s court requires historians to move beyond the age-old stereotypes of female vanity and rivalry, to examine the very specific ways the queen and her serving women constructed and negotiated their positions of power through clothing and their daily bodily interactions. Moreover, analyzing the interactions between the queen and her female attendants more in terms of negotiation rather than conflict will allow scholars to locate women’s political presence at the center of the court and not confined to the margins, where scholars have often placed it.

In order to unpack the nexus of monarchical power, female bodies, and the power of clothing, historians need to analyze the ways in which Elizabeth and her female attendants negotiated their positions of power through clothing and their daily bodily interactions. Moreover, an ordered house where everyone knew their place was considered a microcosm of society at large and a model for good government.
courtiers interacted with each other. In a very basic sense, Elizabeth’s serving women took care of the queen’s body natural which housed the body politic. Elizabeth’s human body, however, was that of a woman, and female bodies were meant to be kept under the control of men. Although the theory of the monarch’s two bodies as explained by Plowden argued that the mystical office of monarch overrode Elizabeth’s defective sex and gave her legitimacy as a female monarch, critics like John Knox and Thomas Becon voiced a connection between a woman’s sexuality and her (in)ability to rule. Elizabeth seemed to have understood that there was an implicit caveat embedded in her ability to rule the body politic: her natural body had to remain chaste. In sixteenth-century European society a woman’s virtue was almost entirely dependent upon her sexual reputation.\(^{34}\) Since a woman could only have licit sex with her husband, as long as Elizabeth remained single, her chastity acted as the glue that bound England’s body politic to her physical body.

One of the important roles Elizabeth’s female attendants served, especially the women of her privy chamber, was to safeguard and vouch for their queen’s sexual virtue. Elizabeth used her body and her clothes to publicly assert her virginity. She often wore fashions considered only appropriate for young, unmarried women.\(^{35}\) Elizabeth also dressed herself and her privy chamber women in garments of white or black, since these colors were symbolic of virginity.\(^{36}\) Most of the warrants that ordered the livery of the

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\(^{35}\) Jane Ashelford, \textit{Dress in the Age of Elizabeth} (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 34. There are the famous accounts of the French ambassador, André Herault, Sieur de Maise recorded in \textit{A Journal of All That Was Accomplished By Monsieur de Maise Ambassador in England from King Henri IV to Queen Elizabeth Anno Domini 1597}, G.B. Harrison (ed. and transl.), (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1931), 23, 36-37 that recount Elizabeth using her dress and body to present herself as the iconic Virgin Queen at the end of her reign at the age of 67.

\(^{36}\) Ashelford 102.
female privy chamberers were for materials that were black in color. By the end of Elizabeth’s reign when her court’s outward celebration of the queen’s choice of permanent virginity had reached its zenith, the maids of honor, usually wore white garments. There are at least three portraits of maids of honor, Lady Elizabeth Southwell, Mary Fitton, and Lady Elizabeth Brydges, who served from 1595 until 1603, and they all wear similar dresses of white material with spiky headdresses. This was but one small way Elizabeth could use clothing to appropriate the bodies of the women around her to project her virginity. In spite of their virginal dress, two of these young ladies, Mary Fitton and Elizabeth Brydges, like their cohort Lady Mary Howard, did not behave chastely. Mary Fitton ended up giving birth to the Earl of Pembroke’s illegitimate child, and Elizabeth Brydges earned the queen’s anger for flirting with the Earl of Essex. When these maids lost their honor, the queen lost more than just mirrors to reflect her own virtue; Elizabeth lost women who could testify to her virginity. When a woman’s sexual reputation was compromised, so too was her credibility in all other areas. Historians can better understand Elizabeth’s wrath over her female attendants’ sexual

37 Ashelford 138, 141, identified the portraits of Lady Elizabeth Southwell and Mary Fitton as dressed in this costume peculiar to the maids of honor towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Based upon Ashelford’s criteria for identifying this costume, the two portraits believed to be of Elizabeth Brydges, Lady Kennedy attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts II painted circa 1595, would fall into this category, as she is depicted in a white costume with the same headdress as the other women. Although I am unsure of her exact tenure as Maid of Honor, she appears to have served Elizabeth from 1595-98, the time period Charles Lister claimed to have lent Brydges money based upon her empty promises to marry him. Apparently she used at least some of Lister’s money to invest in the Earl of Essex’s Cadiz expedition; Essex also appears to have flirted with a receptive and reciprocating Brydges, see Hammer, “Sex and the Virgin Queen,” 88-89, 94, 94 fn. 83.

38 Hammer, “Sex and the Virgin Queen,” for Fitton 84, 94-95, for Brydges 88-89, 94, 94 fn. 83. Hammer 83, 89-90,94, also relates one more maid of honor, Elizabeth Southwell, who gave birth to a child fathered by the Earl of Essex; however, this is not the same Elizabeth Southwell, who was painted in her maid of honor costume by Marcus Gheerearts II around 1599. The woman in the portrait was the granddaughter of Earl and Countess of Nottingham. The Elizabeth Southwell, who lost her maidenhood while a maid of honor, was apparently dismissed after her 1591 pregnancy.
indiscretions by placing them alongside the responsibilities Elizabeth gave her privy chamber women at the beginning of her reign.

The celebration of Elizabeth’s virginity did not start until the mid-1580s when it became clear that she would not marry or bear an heir, and the cult of her virginity could calm fears over the issue of succession and to maintain support for the aging queen.\(^{39}\) Until then, Elizabeth’s Privy Council and perhaps even Elizabeth herself never really considered that she would remain permanently single.\(^{40}\) Virginity, however, was a requirement for Elizabeth throughout the beginning and middle of her reign to both support her right as a woman to exercise a masculine office and to win the hand of a suitable marriage candidate. Dispatches from the Austrian Hapsburg’s ambassadors sent to negotiate a marriage between Elizabeth and one of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand’s sons, the Archduces Charles and Ferdinand, reveal that Elizabeth also needed the help of her privy chamber women to safeguard and attest to her chastity. The imperial ambassador kept the emperor apprised of Elizabeth’s responses to their overtures and to the suits of any other rivals. The one candidate that caused the ambassador the greatest concern was Elizabeth’s Master of the Horse, Robert Dudley. One dispatch in particular reveals that Elizabeth’s privy chamber women had the political and public duty to regulate Elizabeth’s sexuality by keeping surveillance over the queen’s body. It is important enough to be quoted at length:

> For I have employed as my agent . . . who is on very friendly terms with all the ladies of the bedchamber and all other persons who have been about the Queen

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\(^{39}\) John N. King, “Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 43:1 (1990), 30-74. In this article King argues that although Elizabeth was always portrayed as a virgin, she was not portrayed as a woman who had decided upon a permanent state of celibacy and chastity until after the Anjou marriage negotiations fell through.

and have brought her up since her childhood. They all swear by all that is holy that her Majesty has most certainly never been forgetful of her honor. And yet it is not without significance that Her Majesty’s Master of the Horse, Mylord Robert, is preferred by the Queen above all others, and that her Majesty shows her liking for him more markedly than is consistent with her reputation and dignity. But otherwise they have not noticed anything.

Her most intimate Lady of the Bedchamber, Catherine Ashley, some days ago fell at Her Majesty’s feet, and on being questioned, implored her in God’s name to marry and put an end to all these disreputable rumors, telling Her Majesty that her behavior towards the said Master of the Horse occasioned much evil-speaking; for she showed herself so affectionate to him that Her Majesty’s honor and dignity would be sullied, and her subjects would in time become discontented. Her Majesty would thus be the cause of much bloodshed in this realm, for which she would have to give account to God and by which she would merit the eternal curse of her subjects. Rather than that this should happen she would have strangled Her Majesty in the cradle.

Elizabeth replied that she knew that Ashley was worried because of her servant’s “true fidelity” to her mistress. The queen also intimated to Ashley that she would consider marriage for the sake of her subjects, but that she could not make any hasty decisions on such an important matter. This prompted Ashley to plead once more that Elizabeth should quickly make up her mind or risk God’s punishment. Elizabeth answered this second plea thus,

As regards the question that they in their talk coupled her with her Master of the Horse she hoped she had given no one just cause to associate her with her Equerry or any other man in the world . . . She had never understood how any single person could be displeased, seeing that she was always surrounded by her ladies of the bedchamber and maids-of-honor, who at all times could see whether there was anything dishonorable between her and her Master of the Horse. If she had ever had the will or had found pleasure in such a dishonorable life . . . she did not know of anyone who could forbid her; but she trusted in God that nobody would ever live to see her so commit herself.⁴¹

The ambassador’s account makes it clear that he considered the privy chamber women very important sources of information about the queen’s resolve to marry and her

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worthiness as a potential in-law of the imperial family. Although the ambassador’s status precluded him from personally skulking around the privy chamber and befriending the ladies, he had no compunction in hiring an informant to do this for him.

In turn, the ambassador’s informant related that the women who surrounded Elizabeth on a daily basis all swore that Elizabeth’s virginity was still intact despite her public displays of affection towards Robert Dudley. Catherine Ashley’s reprimand to her royal mistress illustrates that Elizabeth’s sexual reputation could easily be called into question. Elizabeth’s public behavior towards Dudley was enough for rumors to spread that would damage her sexual honor and consequently her royal dignity “which would be sullied, and her subjects would in time become discontented.” According to Ashley, if Elizabeth did not marry and act as a chaste wife, no one would trust this amorous single woman with the crown, leading to “much bloodshed in this realm, for which she would have to give account to God.” Ashley (according to this report) makes it very clear that Elizabeth’s sexual virtue supported England’s peace and Elizabeth’s success as queen.

Ashley’s lament that she should have killed Elizabeth as a child rather than let her become a bad queen is very striking. It serves as a reminder that Elizabeth’s body, even before she became queen, had to some extent, always been regulated and put under the surveillance of women. Both Elizabeth and Catherine Ashley learned that Elizabeth’s body and sexuality were the public property of the state through a scandal that had taken place when Elizabeth was a teenage princess: the Thomas Seymour affair. After the death of Henry VIII, Elizabeth lived with her last step-mother, Katherine Parr, who had quickly married Thomas Seymour, brother of the man who was in charge of the minor King Edward VI’s person and government. Being married to a queen dowager had not
quenched Seymour’s ambition for more power, and he decided to start courting a royal princess, Elizabeth, right under Parr’s nose.\textsuperscript{42} Seymour’s attempt to seduce Elizabeth was one of the many misdeeds that led him to the Tower and the execution block for treason. However, Elizabeth and Catherine Ashley, who was her governess at the time, were both arrested and interrogated about the extent of the princess’ relationship with Seymour. Ashley was considered an important source of information about the physical and verbal intimacies Seymour and the princess did and did not share since as Elizabeth’s governess she was in charge of the princess’ person. Even at so young an age, Elizabeth also realized the gravity of her compromised reputation and was concerned about rumors that had arisen claiming that she had been impregnated by Seymour.\textsuperscript{43} Although Elizabeth and Ashley were both released, Ashley had been temporarily removed from her duties to look after Elizabeth and replaced by one Lady Tyrwhit, much to Elizabeth’s dismay.\textsuperscript{44} The Seymour scandal demonstrated early on to Elizabeth that her sexual reputation was an important political tool, and that the women with whom she surrounded herself were expected to if not actually regulate Elizabeth’s body, at least to observe and report if it was being sexually misused.

As queen, Elizabeth acknowledged the authority that the women of her privy chamber had in observing how she used her body. She was able to rebut Ashley’s accusations that there were rumors circulating that could be detrimental to her monarchical authority by replying that there was no way anyone could believe these rumors “seeing that she was always surrounded by her ladies of the bedchamber and

\textsuperscript{42} Levin 6-7.
\textsuperscript{43} Levin 7.
\textsuperscript{44} BL, Lansdowne 109/42 f., 102r-103v. This document appears to just be a draft of a letter, but in it Elizabeth complains about Lady Thywrit replacing her governess Catherine Ashley.
maids of honor, who at all times could see whether there was anything dishonorable between her and the Master of the Horse.” The constant presence of these women, their constant surveillance of the queen’s actions, gave them the authority to act as witnesses attesting to Elizabeth’s chastity. The duty of Elizabeth’s women to both enforce and protect Elizabeth’s sexual reputation, and consequently her monarchical authority reflected the larger cultural role that early modern women had in policing the bodies of other women. As Laura Gowing has demonstrated in the context of the rural and urban household the control exercised over sex, pregnancy, and reproduction was not confined to male magistrates or patriarchal fathers and husbands, but was also employed by women who held a moral authority and power over other women’s bodies, which were often exercised through touch. In a household that had a husband and wife along with unmarried female servants, women often shared confined personal spaces, such as beds, giving them opportunities to watch each other’s bodies, and they were often called upon to physically examine other women’s bodies to detect any signs of pregnancy or childbirth.45

Although we have no example of the queen’s privy chamber women physically examining her for signs of sexual congress or its possible consequences, the queen did often share her bed with one of her privy chamberers. Elizabeth appeared to have had favorite female sleeping companions. In a 1576 letter to Mary Scudamore, the Earl of Sussex summoned Scudamore back to court when Lady Dorothy Stafford broke her leg and could not sleep with Elizabeth. Sussex wrote that “I fear until you come her majestie shall not in the night have for the most part so good rest as she wyll take after your

comyng." Therefore, Elizabeth was constantly under the surveillance of her privy chamber women, which makes Elizabeth’s claim to Ashley that no one could keep her from doing whatever she wished, even if it was dishonorable, to some extent, a hollow statement. Elizabeth knew very well that she could not afford to have her reputation ruined, for with it she would lose her monarchical authority; and therefore, she needed to ensure that her privy chamber women would be able to defend her chastity.

Thus, Elizabeth may have used her body and clothes to materially fashion her virgin image, but she also needed her serving women to safeguard, attest to, and project her virginity. Just as in early modern English villages or towns where mistresses and their female servants exercised authority over each other’s bodies and sexuality through surveillance and intervention, the court of the Virgin Queen experienced the same dynamics. Elizabeth tried to control her female servants’ bodies to ensure that they reflected her sexual continence and her overall ability to govern her subjects. However, Elizabeth needed women whose sexual reputations were not tarnished to ensure they were credible witnesses who could support the queen’s claims of virginity. The privy chamber women, by sleeping with Elizabeth and dressing her, were positioned to observe any bodily changes in the queen. Moreover, as the example of Kat Ashley attests, the privy chamber did sometimes intervene in the matter of how Elizabeth used her body. Therefore, Elizabeth depended upon her female attendants’ authority of and over her

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47 Gowing’s seminal study of how early modern women enforced patriarchal norms over each other’s bodies is confined to women of the middling and lower classes, but she does show that both mistresses and female servants were in a position to observe and thus regulate each other’s bodily activities, albeit married mistresses had more power of their own bodies as well as over single women’s bodies, for instance see Gowing 69-73.
body to speak knowingly about her natural body’s virginal state to quell any doubts that the queen’s clothes and physical appearance could not dispel on their own.

It appears that the privy chamber women’s mere presence was an important political tool that Elizabeth could use to safeguard her reputation and authority. This power exercised by the privy chamber women stemmed from their constant attendance upon her, but could also be used against the queen, hurting Elizabeth’s authority. Even in death, Elizabeth’s sexual reputation was still subject to slander. There are different accounts of the queen’s death and the treatment of her corpse which reveal that some of her serving women continued to protect their former queen’s reputation while others used their position and the authority that came with it to attack Elizabeth’s sexual virtue. Scholars have demonstrated that both contemporaries of Elizabeth and historians after her always held a fascination with Elizabeth’s sexuality, a fascination that included discussions over how her corpse was treated. As Catherine Loomis has argued there are conflicting accounts about whether or not Elizabeth’s dead body was surgically opened and the viscera removed, part of the early modern embalming procedure, which speaks to the anxiety over Elizabeth’s claims to virginity and its impact upon the succession.

Elizabeth left orders that she not be “opened” by surgeons, and there are corroborating contemporary reports, such as John Chamberlain’s letter to Dudley Carleton, dated 30 March 1603, which reads, “the body was not opened but wrapped up in cerecloth and other preservatives.” The Venetian ambassador, Giovanni Carlo Scaramelli went so far

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49 Loomis 493-495.

as to report that “Meantime the body of the late Queen, by her own orders has neither been opened, nor indeed, seen by any living soul save by three of her ladies.”51 Although no one else claimed that only a select few privy chamber women prepared Elizabeth’s corpse for burial, Robert Carey did recount in his memoirs that Elizabeth died only surrounded by “her women that attended her.”52 On the surface, Scaramelli’s statement about the privy chamber women refusing surgeons access to the Elizabeth’s corpse does not explicitly connect the privy chamber women’s refusal with the possible intention of shielding the queen from any charges of sexual impropriety that a surgical exploration of Elizabeth’s internal organs could reveal. But, as Loomis postulates, it is very possible that Elizabeth, her female privy chamberers, or the male privy councilors did not want the late queen’s internal organs examined since any findings that indicated that she had been sexually active, physically deformed, or had given birth would have challenged the late queen’s claim to have lived and died a virgin.

However, Loomis was far from the first person to make this connection. Francis Osborne’s 1658 history of Elizabeth’s reign, Historical Memoires on the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James seriously considers the possibility that Elizabeth’s privy chamber refused to let the late queen’s body be surgically explored. Osborne understands the privy chamber women’s treatment of the queen’s corpse as an effort to preserve the secret of her sexual history. When Osborne addressed the issue of

“it is certain the Queen was not embowled,” and goes on to state that she was wrapped in cere cloth, but sloppily.

51 CSP, Venetian, X, 2.

52 Robert Carey, The Memoirs of Robert Carey, ed. F.H. Mares (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 60. Carey does not weigh in on whether or not Elizabeth was embalmed, but simply states that after the bishop’s prayer, everyone left the queen’s bedside except the privy chamber women, and then later that night Elizabeth died. Carey does not go into any details once he learns that the queen has died because he is more intent on explaining why and how he was able to be the first person to tell King James VI of Scotland that he had inherited the English crown.
Whether Queene Elizabeth was a maid or no: which may render all reports dubious that come from meaner Men: yet it maybe true that the Ladies of her bedchamber denied to her body the ceremony of searching and embalming, due to dead monarchs: But that she had a Son bred in the State of Venice, and a Daughter I know not where nor when.\(^{53}\)

In addition to possibly tarnishing her reputation, any allegations that there might be direct heirs of Elizabeth’s body would complicate the Scottish king’s ability to succeed to the English throne.\(^{54}\) Even though the veracity of the Venetian ambassador’s report is unclear, it makes sense that he would believe that the women who took care of Elizabeth’s body and shielded her sexual reputation in life would continue to do so after their royal mistress’ death. The fact that Osborne included a rumor, so similar to Scaramelli’s claim about the privy chamber women rejecting the option to embalm the queen’s corpse, when he refused to insert “other strange tales” about Elizabeth’s possible sex life relegating them “as fitter for a Romance, then to mingle with so much truth and integrity as I professe,” speaks to this particular rumor’s power.\(^{55}\) Osborne has no problem dismissing “all reports dubious that come from meaner men,” but he is willing to contemplate that “it maybe true” that Elizabeth’s privy chamber women had the power and authority to regulate access to the queen’s body even after Elizabeth’s death.\(^{56}\) The claims and speculations made by Elizabeth’s contemporaries and future authors who wrote about her reign reflects that by regulating Elizabeth’s natural body, the queen’s


\(^{54}\) Loomis 494.

\(^{55}\) Osborne 62; Watkins 137 and Loomis 496 discuss the possible reasons why Osborne included this rumor about the privy chamber women refusing to let Elizabeth’s corpse be surgically examined. As Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal In Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603-1660* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 273, points out, Sir Francis Osborne strongly disliked James and his works often denigrated him. Therefore, it is quite possible Osborne included rumors that might have called Elizabeth’s sexual reputation into question in order to undermine James I’s claim as the legitimate heir to the English throne.

\(^{56}\) Brown 131-133, argued that the women’s central placement around the queen gave them the ability to control access to Elizabeth.
privy chamber women were performing a political task that affected the outcome of which natural body would next assume England’s body politic.

It is exactly this connection that makes the manuscript account of Elizabeth’s death by Elizabeth Southwell, one of her former maids of honor, such a damning document. Elizabeth Southwell’s reconstruction of Queen Elizabeth’s death and funeral has been dismissed by historians as an inaccurate piece of Catholic anti-Elizabeth propaganda; however, as Loomis has argued, although the retelling may not be factually accurate, it is still an important historical source when we try to understand why Southwell decided to tell this story in this particular way.\(^{57}\) Elizabeth Southwell, whose mother was a Lady of the Bedchamber and whose grandparents were the Earl and Countess of Nottingham, close friends of Elizabeth I, served the queen in the privy chamber as a maid of honor from 1600-1603.\(^{58}\) I shall not go into detail about Southwell’s entire account, which covers the queen’s last days, her death, and ends before her funeral procession, except in regards to what she said about the treatment of the queen’s corpse. According to Southwell, immediately after the queen expired in her bed the privy councilors left to proclaim James Stuart as King of England,

leaving her bodie with charge not to be opened such being her desire, but Cecil having given a secret warrant to the surgeons they opened her: which the rest of the Councell afterwards passed it over though they meant yt not so: now her bodie being seared up was brought to whit hall. Where being watched everie night by 6 severall Ladies, my selfe that night there watching as one of them being all about the bodie which was fast nailed up in a bord coffin with leaves of lead covered with velvet, her bodie and head break with such a crack that spleated the wood lead and cer cloth. whereupon the next daie she was faine to be new trimmed up; whereupon they gave their verdicts that yf she had not ben opened the breath of her bodie would a ben much worse.\(^{59}\)

\(^{57}\) Loomis 483-484.

\(^{58}\) Loomis 487.

\(^{59}\) Loomis 486-87; Southwell’s manuscript is printed in full in Loomis 484-487.
Southwell reminds the reader that she was a witness to the gruesome spectacle of the queen’s corpse bursting open with such force that it broke through its lead encasement and splintered the coffin. This is only one of the indignities that the former maid of honor claims the late queen’s body underwent; Robert Cecil, Elizabeth’s Secretary, went against Elizabeth’s wishes and had her body opened for embalming. No other account corroborates Southwell’s claims about Elizabeth being opened, or, even more importantly, that her corpse exploded in the coffin.\(^\text{60}\)

The former Elizabethan maid of honor’s account has been considered a historically dubious document because it was written three years after Elizabeth’s death by a woman with a complicated and compromised reputation. Elizabeth Southwell had left England in 1605, disguised as her married lover’s page, and went to Italy where the couple converted to Catholicism, married, and attached themselves to the Tuscan court.\(^\text{61}\)

There Southwell met the Jesuit Robert Persons who recorded her account of Elizabeth’s last days. Nonetheless, her narrative still serves as an important historical piece, not because it is necessarily telling the truth, but because it is important to understand why Southwell said things that appear to be untrue. In one sense, Southwell’s assertion that Elizabeth’s body natural had undergone disemboweling highlights the fact that all other sources insisted that the queen had not been opened, revealing the widespread anxiety over the late queen’s body and the succession.\(^\text{62}\)

\(^{60}\) There are accounts that state Elizabeth was embalmed such as John Clapham’s manuscript history, Certain Observations, as do other pamphlet’s describing the funeral procession; however, as Loomis 495 explains, by “embalming” the authors may have meant that the corpse had been treated with preservatives and not necessarily cut open and disembowled. There is only one account which clearly claims that Elizabeth was surgically opened against her wishes that of Elizabeth.

\(^{61}\) Loomis 487. Southwell’s paramour was Robert Dudley, the illegitimate son of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. The two married despite the fact Dudley had abandoned his wife and five daughters back in England.

\(^{62}\) Loomis 495-496.
strategy when fabricating the story of Elizabeth’s corpse exploding since its gruesomeness would reveal the queen for what she really was, a rotting human body, not a divine goddess.

Historians can gain a firmer handle on Southwell’s possible motives for writing such a negative account of her former royal mistress by analyzing the strategic employment of her story by the Jesuit priest Robert Persons in his treatises against the Oath of Allegiance that the new King of England, James I, insisted his subjects take.63 Persons first applies Southwell’s account in his 1608 *The Ivdgment of a Catholike Englishman, Living in Banishment for His Religion* in which he argues that Elizabeth’s successor, James, had been misled by bad councilors to enforce the Oath of Allegiance, which would force Catholics to deny the supremacy of the Pope in matters of religion, which denied Catholics their basic right of freedom of conscience.64 One of the reasons the late queen is dragged into this debate is because (according to Persons) the supporters of the oath portray Elizabeth as a godly monarch, blessed with God’s favor, who ruled with clemency and mercy over all of her subjects, and that she only executed Catholics on the grounds of treason, not for religious reasons.65 According to Persons, James is wrongly encouraged to follow his predecessor’s godly example, and so Persons must set

63 Loomis 483. The two Persons’ tracts that either refer to or quote extracts from Southwell’s account are his *The Ivdgment of a Catholike English-man, Living in Banishment For His Religion* (1608) and *A Discvssion of the Answere of M.William Barlowe* (1612).

64 As the work by Peter Lake and Michael Questier has demonstrated, Persons’ and his coterie’s (which did not include all Catholics) argued that the Oath of Allegiance was not just about civil obedience, but religious conformity, and if they refused to take the oath were persecuted as martyrs, whereas Protestants argued that Catholics who refused to take it and subsequently punished were traitors, not martyrs. See Lake and Questier, “Puritans, Papists, and the “Public Sphere” in Early Modern England: The Edmund Campion Affair in Context,” *The Journal of Modern History* 72:3 (2000), 606. Lake and Questier re-examine the relationships among Catholics, Protestants, and politics in Early Modern England in “Agency, Appropriation and Rhetoric Under the Gallows: Puritans, Romanists and the State in Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* 153 (1996), 64-107, and Section II of *The Anti-Christ’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 187-334.

the record straight about the late queen’s character and reign: Elizabeth was a godless tyrant who persecuted loyal Catholics for their religion. Therefore another debate arose between Persons and his adversaries, whether or not Elizabeth was a virtuous queen who merely reacted to traitorous Catholic subjects or whether as a tyrant she persecuted without cause loyal Catholic subjects.

Those who portrayed Elizabeth as virtuous rested their position upon various arguments that she lived and died in a state of grace. As scholars have demonstrated, in the early modern period, a Christian’s death indicated whether or not they had lived a good life and had earned eternal salvation or damnation. Therefore, Persons attacked Elizabeth’s virtuousness with his knowledge about her “lamentable end” that he received from “a person of much credit that was present at all her last sicknes, combats, and death, and relateth all that passed as an eye witness, which I passe ouer for breuity and modestyes sake.” Despite his refusal to go into details about the late queen’s death, he makes the connection between a sinful life and a bad death. In the previous section, Persons builds his case against Elizabeth’s godliness by arguing she enjoyed worldly happiness in terms of abundance, possessions, and power, but ignored her spiritual well-being. He unfavorably compared good Catholics who followed “the old platforme of Saints lyues, prescribed in Scriptures and practiced by seruants of God” with “the pathes of Q. Elizabeth, which are knowne by most men to haue byn . . . most opposite to these”

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66 According to Persons, *The Judgment*, 38 “that liberty of Conscience is most conforme to Gods law, and that wrestling, or forcing of Consciences, is the highest Tyranny, that can be exercised vpon man.”
which in turn “lead to an other opposite end.” Persons’ account links Elizabeth’s impoverished spiritual life with a miserable death, which in turn broadcasted the queen’s eternal damnation to those who learned of her true demise. In The Judgment, Persons’ case against Elizabeth does not rest upon the details of the queen’s miserable end, but rather on the source of the story, the “person of much credit” who witnessed the spectacle.

Persons moves quickly from her death to examples of Elizabeth’s illegitimate usurpation of power and how she used it as a tyrant to persecute English Catholics, thereby reinforcing his portrayal of a godless queen whose religious policies were empty of any justice and should not be emulated. In addition to portraying the queen as a tyrant, Persons links her tyranny to her dishonorable birth to a woman who “was neuer King Henryes lawfull wyfe," her role in the Thomas Seymour affair, and her participation in rebellions against her elder half-sister Mary I, a combination of events that connects sexual corruption with political illegitimacy. By asserting that Elizabeth’s mother was not Henry VIII’s wife, Persons is able to highlight Elizabeth’s bastardy and her mother’s illicit sexuality. In this equation, Elizabeth is guilty of sexual incontinence by association. Persons’ presses the attack on Elizabeth’s sexual reputation with the example of the Thomas Seymour affair claiming that “the Admiralls falling in loue with her, and making away his former wife Queen Catherine Parre to enioy her.” Although Elizabeth is not formally accused of letting Seymour fulfill his desire to “enioy” her, she

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70 Levin 80-81, demonstrates other libels during the queen’s reign used the queen’s illegitimacy as part of their argument that her parents were sexually and morally corrupt and Elizabeth inherited her parents’ faults. Moreover, as Levin 75 and Hammer, “Sex and the Virgin Queen,” 83, have demonstrated, Elizabeth was always wary about rumors that attacked her sexual reputation because she remembered how such attacks brought down her mother.
71 Persons, Judgment, 32.
is at best an enchantress who bewitched a man to kill his wife and follow a path of self-destruction. Indeed, the inclusion of the Seymour affair in quick succession to the story of Parliament’s removal of Elizabeth from the royal family and, thus, from the line to the English throne, presents the late queen as someone who consistently usurps power that it not rightfully hers. However, Elizabeth’s ambition for power that does not belong to her continues with her provocation of the rebellions to depose Mary I in her favor. Although Persons does not explicitly connect the dots, he presents Elizabeth as the daughter of an unchaste woman who used her sexuality to displace a queen, and who herself uses her inherited sexual powers to ensnare men to promote her to higher positions.

Even though Persons did not go into detail about the queen’s death, he creates an argument based upon circular logic: her miserable death was both consequence and evidence of her feckless faith, tyrannous rule, and eternal damnation. The claims made in *The Iudgement* were rebutted in 1609 by William Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln and chaplain to both Elizabeth and her successor, who claimed the queen had died in a state of grace, surrounded by prayers and clergy. Barlow’s rebuttal provoked Persons to write a response piece, *A Discvssion of the Answere of M. William Barlow* (1612), which included the majority of Southwell’s account of Elizabeth’s last days, culminating in her death and her corpse exploding at the wake. For the most part, *A Discvssion* reiterates Persons’ earlier arguments about Elizabeth’s illegitimacy, heresy, and tyranny, but this

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72 However, these are only two of the queens in *The Iudgment* that are mistreated by this sexually promiscuous mother-daughter team. Right after Persons discusses the Seymour affair he is quick to blame Elizabeth for the “rebellions of Wiat, Courtney, Carewes, Stafford, & others, were made for her” against her half-sister Mary I (32). Although Elizabeth’s order to execute Mary, Queen of Scots is not discussed in this section, it is brought up elsewhere to speak to Elizabeth’s tyranny and “iealousy [that] did so vexe & consume her inwardly . . . vntill she made away, against all law of Nature and Nations, the nearest nto her in Royall bloud . . . I meane his Ma[jesties] noble renowned Mother, Queene of France & Scotland”(34). Loomis 501.

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time Persons related the tale of the queen’s horrible end in detail to support his own claims and counter Barlow’s. Even though Persons claims to have added nothing to this eye-witness account given by the unnamed but “worthy person,” he did make some additions, which helped him present Elizabeth’s awful end as a foreshadowing of her eternal damnation. For example, Southwell alleges that Elizabeth told “Ladie Scrop with whom she was verie privat and confident being her neare kinswoman her majtie told her, commanding her to conceale the same, [said] she saw one night in her bed her bodie exceeding leane and fearfull in a light of fire.” As well as recounting this part of Southwell’s account (but leaving out Lady Scrope’s name), Persons added another story of Elizabeth telling one more lady who “was one of the nearest about” the queen’s person that she saw night visions “of the bright flame she had seen.” It is very possible that these dreams and visions, which so scared the queen to the point that she needed to tell someone, showed Elizabeth burning in hell. Persons’ account also differs from Southwell’s in that he does not include her description of Elizabeth still refusing to name a successor, and instead embellishes upon Southwell’s description of Elizabeth refusing to pray with the clergy who surrounded her. Despite some of these differences, Persons does relate that Elizabeth’s corpse was opened against her wishes (again Persons refrains from identifying the specific people involved) and that her corpse exploded through the lead and wooden casket during her wake. Persons uses Southwell’s account to paint a picture of a frightened, dying, unrepentant, old woman whose commands are no longer followed and who is about to be punished by God. It is no coincidence that Persons recounts Elizabeth’s sticky end right before he launches into a discussion on why the

74 Southwell as quoted in Loomis 485
75 Robert Persons, A Discvssion of the Answere of M. William Barlow (1612), 218.
76 Persons, A Discvssion, 219 is different from Southwell’s account as printed in Loomis 486.
queen’s soul cannot be saved and is, therefore, eternally damned.\textsuperscript{77} In both of Persons’ books, Elizabeth’s natural body is connected to her body politic. Denigrating Elizabeth’s natural body with dreams of hell and her exploding corpse attacked Elizabeth’s monarchical authority, because Persons presents them as proof of her tyrannical rule.\textsuperscript{78}

Although Persons did not identify any of the people he mentioned in his retelling of Southwell’s account, even concealing his informer’s sex, he still constantly referred to women who were either physically or emotionally close to the queen to provide the anecdotes to move his story forward and to give his version of events weight. Just as the Hapsburg ambassador at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign needed her privy chamber women for information about her natural body that would determine the international politics between the Hapsburgs and England, now a Catholic Jesuit was trying to shape English domestic politics was relying upon the same group of women. Moreover, the queen herself used her female privy chamberers as shields to protect her sexual reputation on which her sovereignty depended. In many ways, Elizabeth required the help of her female courtiers to transform herself into a virgin queen and later the Virgin Queen. The privy chamber women were important sources of information about the queen’s body which stemmed from their close physical relationship with the queen as they fulfilled their primary functions in dressing and caring for the queen’s body. This constant attendance upon the queen’s body provided the privy chamber women with knowledge about the queen’s body, which could be used to either defend or attack the queen’s monarchical authority. Just as women exercised their authority over other women’s bodies in towns and villages across England, the queen and her serving women at court

\textsuperscript{77} Persons, \textit{A Discussion}, 220-228.  
\textsuperscript{78} Loomis 484, 489.
exercised their control over each other’s bodies through surveillance. Both the queen’s body and the bodies of her serving women played a role in fashioning, projecting, protecting or challenging Elizabeth’s body politic.

**Embodying the Queen**

Elizabeth’s virginity, therefore, was both constructed and assaulted by the ways the queen and her female attendants dressed each other and what they said about each other’s bodies. The queen used her clothes and those of her privy chamber women to project an image of a virgin queen reigning over a court of virtuous men and women, but that was not the only way Elizabeth could use the garments and the bodies of her privy chamber women to augment her authority. The various ways Elizabethan court women used their garments and bodies sometimes had a direct impact on how Elizabeth could employ her body politic. Elizabethan female courtiers’ power, especially that of the privy chamber women, rested upon their constant presence around the queen. Female courtiers could either connect the queen to networks of subjects or try to disrupt Elizabeth’s attempt to extend her sovereignty. Elizabeth often used sartorial gifts and offered sartorial privileges to acknowledge that she had created a space where women could wield influence. These sartorial rewards and dispensations marked these women as part of the inner circle that closely surrounded the queen, a space that sometimes allowed these women to act for Elizabeth, to stand in for her queenly body. Sometimes this special space and its privileges created tensions between the queen and her uniquely empowered royal servants, as in the cases of Lady Mary Howard and Arbella Stuart. However, in spite of these women’s potential to disrupt relationships between Elizabeth and her
subjects, they usually co-operated with the queen and participated in the processes that connected Elizabeth to larger circles of her subjects. Women who served Elizabeth often had the opportunity to act as queenly surrogates, representing her at functions she could not attend, and consequently extending the queen’s authority outside of the palace walls where she resided.

One important source that highlights the ways in which Elizabeth and female courtiers used their clothing and bodies to interact with each other to either extend or limit the other’s power and influence is contemporary artwork. Although Elizabeth’s iconography has been studied at great length, it is usually in the context where she is the lone figure. Much less attention has been paid to the images of Elizabeth where she is presented with other women. A consequence of this oversight is that studies of Elizabeth’s iconography reduce the female presence at court to the lone figure of the queen surrounded only by adoring male courtiers. I will focus on four such images of Elizabeth with other women: *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses*, attributed to Hans Eworth, circa 1569; a miniature painting, *An Elizabethan Maundy*, attributed to Levina Teerlinc painted around 1565; *Elizabeth I Receiving Dutch Emissaries* drawn by an unknown artist of the German school around 1585; and a portrait of Elizabeth I by Marcus Gheeraerts painted sometime around 1580-85 known as “The Peace Portrait.”

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79 A very important exception is found in the work done by Caroline McManus, “Reading the Margins,” 31-58 and “Queen Elizabeth, Dol Common, and the Performance of the Royal Maundy,” *ELR* 32:2 (2002), 189-213.

80 McManus, “Reading the Portraits,” 31-32.

81 Some of the portraits’ artists have not been identified beyond a doubt, but I have followed the general consensus established by art historians and used the phrase “attributed.” However, throughout the rest of the chapter I shall use the artist’s last name to more easily differentiate which of the four images I am discussing, but with the understanding that these attributions are not a hundred percent certain. Unfortunately I could obtain the permissions to reproduce these images in my dissertation, but you can find color reproductions of all of these images in *Elizabeth: The Exhibition* (the page numbers are listed to correspond with the order the images were listed in the text above), 190, 74, 103, 194.
With the exception of the Teerlinc miniature, these images are striking in that none of them commemorate a specific event. For example, the painting of Elizabeth I receiving Dutch emissaries is not a snapshot of an actual event that took place since it depicts Mary, Queen of Scots in the same room as Elizabeth, and historians have established that the queens never met face to face. Even the Teerlinc miniature which depicts Elizabeth performing an annual church service does not necessarily commemorate a specific year’s service. These images may not be recording specifically or overtly political events, but they do reveal that the court, even when imagined, was not seen as an all male space only inhabited by one exceptional woman.  

Assessing the role of Elizabethan female courtiers from contemporary portraiture is not a straightforward task. One of the few scholars to analyze Elizabeth’s interaction with other women is Caroline McManus who has examined many of the images that depict Elizabeth with other women and argues that women depicted in Elizabeth’s portraiture were able to “define Elizabeth as queen (and, in later years, as Virgin Queen) not only by their formation of a deferential retinue and their performance of ritualized services, but also by the use of their sexuality to reinforce or offset Elizabeth’s.”  

Virginal maids of honor and chaste, married female courtiers both reflected and reinforced Elizabeth as the virtuous Virgin Queen. By juxtaposing the queen with other women in a portrait, Elizabeth’s exceptional, “political, virginal body” is defined in contrast to the “‘natural,’ sexually active bodies” of her female courtiers.  

However, as McManus also notes, female courtiers often used their sexuality to follow their own

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82 Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 43, 54, 84, was one of the first to argue that these images are not snapshots of singular, actual moments, but grandiose statements of the greatness of Elizabeth, her court, and her courtiers.

83 McManus, “Reading the Margins,” 32.

84 McManus, “Reading the Margins,” 32.
agendas by contracting marriages or conducting affairs which challenged both
Elizabeth’s public image and her political authority. Although McManus’
groundbreaking work adds another dimension to the first part of my argument that court
women helped construct Elizabeth’s virginal reputation which buttressed her rule, the
very title of one of her articles is problematic: “Reading the Margins: Female Courtiers in
the Portraits of Elizabeth I,” both locates and confines female courtiers’ power to the
periphery. Moreover, focusing solely on how female courtiers’ sexuality could construct
Elizabeth’s limits the ways in which these women could exercise power over Elizabeth’s
monarchical image and queenly authority. Women at Elizabeth’s court are then restricted
to only being able to challenge Elizabeth’s political hegemony as sexual rivals. Another
layer of interpretation needs to be added to the readings of these group portraits; they also
demonstrate how these women could help augment Elizabeth’s monarchical authority by
extending the queen’s presence where she could not be, which in turn, enabled Elizabeth
to build connections with more subjects than she otherwise would have been able to do
by herself. Furthermore, these images also illustrate how clothing played an important
role in the construction of the queen’s and her court women’s power.

When examining the four images chosen of Elizabeth with other women, it
becomes understandable why scholars located Elizabeth’s female attendants on the
margins since that is where these women are positioned in these compositions. On closer
inspection, however, although these women are often positioned in the margins of these
compositions, they are also depicted in close proximity to the queen. It is important to
remember how monarchical power purportedly functioned, at least according to one
model: it radiated outward from the monarch. The distribution of royal favor and rewards
was directly related to one’s physical proximity to the ruler. Therefore, if Elizabeth was the center, her power was first distributed to those closest to her. Technically, the privy chamber women inhabited the orbit that most closely circled Elizabeth’s sun. These women are only projected on the margins because these images can only depict one moment in the trajectory of the women’s close circulation around Elizabeth.

Often it is only by including dress in the analysis of these images that the full extent of Elizabeth’s female attendants’ power to construct their queen’s authority is revealed. In the Hans Eworth 1569 portrait of *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses* Elizabeth wears a crown and holds her scepter and orb, all three accouterments acting as symbols of her office. The crown in this portrait is very similar to the ones present in a miniature of Elizabeth in her coronation robes painted sometime between 1559 and 1579 as well as in a panel version of the coronation portrait produced around 1600. Eworth has the queen exiting a building where she faces three Classical goddesses: Juno, Pallas-Minerva, and Venus. Behind Elizabeth are two female courtiers, one carries her train while talking to the second woman. Most examinations of this portrait have revolved around interpreting the figure of Elizabeth alongside the Latin inscription found on the frame which states (in translation),

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Pallas was keen of brain, Juno queen of might
    The rosy face of Venus was in beauty shining bright
Elizabeth then came:
    And overwhelmed Queen Juno took to flight
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85 Starkey, “The King’s Privy Chamber, 1485-1547,” “Intimacy and Innovation” 71-118, and “Court, Council, and Nobility in Tudor England,” 175-203. However, it was Brown, 131-133, who in addition to expanding upon this model to argue that the privy chamber women controlled access to the queen’s body also posited that the privy chamber women’s central placement around the queen gave them the ability to influence the queen, connect her to networks of subjects, and extend her physical presence outside of the palace walls.
86 Tarnya Cooper, entry for “item 28, Miniature of Elizabeth I in her Coronation Robes, c.1559-1570,” and item “29, Portrait of Elizabeth I in her Coronation Robes, c.1600,” in Elizabeth: The Exhibition, 42-43.
Pallas was silenced; Venus blushed for shame.\(^{87}\)

Other scholars have posited that this depiction of the queen in conjunction with the verse plays upon the myth of the judgment of Paris with Elizabeth’s gold orb standing in for the golden apple.\(^{88}\) In this scene Elizabeth acts as both Paris, who judged which of the goddesses was the most beautiful, and as the winner of the contest.

Each of the goddesses is differentiated from Elizabeth and her attendants by their dress (or undress) and from each other by symbols. The symbol of the peacock indicates that the woman it is closest to is Juno, whereas Pallas’ identity is made manifest by her armor. Venus is identified by her nudity and the placement of Cupid with his wings and trademark bow and arrows. Sometimes, these symbols, such as the peacock, could stand on their own; therefore, the peacock both identifies the goddess’ body, but also makes it redundant.\(^{89}\) Elizabeth’s symbols of office, her crown, scepter, and orb can also all stand on their own for the office of monarch. Therefore, just as each goddesses’ iconography establishes their identity with symbols that when depicted alongside the goddess identifies her but could also, in specific contexts, stand in for the goddess and represent the goddess in the absence of her body, Elizabeth’s female attendants may work in the same capacity, acting as extensions of the queen with the ability to represent Elizabeth in her absence. This ability of her royal attendants to represent the queen was a political tool.

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\(^{87}\) McManus, “Reading the Margins,” 34.

\(^{88}\) Roy Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy: Pageantry, Painting Iconography* (Rochester, New York: Boydell Press, 1995), 1, 128. Strong 127 seems to lean more towards Lucas de Heere being the artist. The initials HE is in a different style than the monogram HE employed by Eworth. In one of the most recent works that discusses this portrait, Karen Hearn, in her entry for item “192. Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses, 1569” *Elizabeth: The Exhibition*, 190 “attributes” the portrait to Hans Eworth. See also McManus “Reading the Margins,” 34-35. In this portrait the orb is golden, unlike the Coronation miniature and larger portrait which has a silver orb with a decorative gold and jewel encrusted band.

\(^{89}\) For example in a portrait of Anne of Denmark painted by Marcus Gheeraerts the younger, circa 1611-14, depicts the queen wearing a dress embroidered with peacock feathers to create a parallel between the queen consort of James I with Juno the wife of the king of the Roman gods, Jupiter. See Karen Hearn, entry for item “130, Anne of Denmark c.1611-14,” in Karen Hearn (ed.), *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630* (London: Tate Gallery, 1995), 192.
utilized by Elizabeth under specific circumstances. In this picture, the queen and her women are connected by the queen’s garment illustrating that these women had a very public role via their service to Elizabeth. Clothing obscured the lines demarcating where the queen’s body ended and her female servants’ bodies began. The woman who holds Elizabeth’s train is dressed in a gown of a similar, if not the same, color as the bodice and skirt of Elizabeth’s open gown.90 This same woman’s gown further echoes Elizabeth’s in that it is trimmed with aglets which seem to mirror the pattern made by the slashing on the queen’s robe which revealed its silver lining. The second female attendant has hair the same color as the queen’s, and her body is obscured by Elizabeth’s body and the extension of the queen’s train.

The artist was not the only one to use clothing to blur the lines separating the queen’s body from her female attendants. Elizabeth herself helped to diminish the sartorial lines that separated her from her female courtiers by giving these women gifts of clothes, often her own clothes. These sartorial gifts of queenly clothing were only one of the ways Elizabeth both created and protected a special space of privilege for her female courtiers. Elizabeth also issued royal proclamations that exempted her privy chamber women and any recipients of her sartorial largesse from the sumptuary laws which dictated which materials and garments could be worn by which social classes. Sumptuary law is often dismissed by scholars because it appears to have been so poorly enforced; however, it may prove more useful to focus less on who these laws tried to regulate than

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90 For an assessment of Elizabeth’s dress in this portrait see Jane Ashelford, A Visual History of Costume: the Sixteenth Century (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1983), 78. For examination of other portraits with outfits similar to those worn by the two female attendants in the later 1560s see Ashelford 73-74, 77, 78.
on those who were exempted from them. About half of the twelve royal proclamations concerning the regulation of apparel issued by Elizabeth exempted office holders at court, including the women who held the court positions of lady or gentlewoman of the privy chamber and the maids of honor, from many of their social peers’ sartorial limitations. These exceptions are important because they identify how ordinary people were able to exercise and display their ability to exercise extraordinary power.

Elizabeth’s proclamations regulating clothing were not intended to create new sumptuary laws, but to renew ones issued under Henry VIII and Mary I. The Henrician legislation did not explicitly regulate the clothing of women except to clarify the sartorial privileges of the female members of the royal family. Mary I passed a law regulating the amount of silk worn in hats, but stated that this law did not change the previous regulations concerning which women could lawfully wear silk “in their Cappes, Hattes, Gyrdells and Hoodes.” English sumptuary law, unlike its Continental European counterparts, focused primarily on what men wore, not women’s dress. It is unclear if authorities presumed that women would simply follow the same parameters given to their husbands since actual garments were rarely referred to—the laws’ main focus was the material used to make, line, or decorate clothes. Elizabeth’s first proclamation on “Enforcing the Statutes of Apparel” did not mention women’s dress anywhere in the text, and the second one issued in 1562 only mentioned the “Ladies and gentlewomen attending upon the queen or resorting to the court, and their gentlewomen” who were to

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91 Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Berg, 2003), 139-143, discusses how scholars often see sumptuary legislation as unimportant because it was so often unenforced.


93 1 & 2 Philip and Mary, c.2, 1554, *Statutes of the Realm* IV, 239.
dress “according to the ancient order of the court.” It is likely that the 1562 proclamation was referring to the sections in the Henrician and Marian laws that exempted those men and women who served at court from the sumptuary legislation. Women’s dress is finally addressed at great length and in a separate category from the one which discussed men’s dress in the royal proclamation of 1574. The terms of the 1574 proclamation were repeated in the proclamations enforcing apparel of 1580 and 1597. As these three proclamations make clear, women needed to dress according to their husband’s or father’s rank, unless they were a member of the queen’s privy chamber. For example, according to the 1574 proclamation, “None shall wear any velvet . . . furs . . . lace of gold or silver: except all degrees above mentioned [duchesses, marchionesses, vicountesses, baronesses] the wives of knights of the Garter and of the Privy Council, the ladies of the gentlewomen of the privy chamber, and maidens of honor.” This explicit wording builds upon the precedents set in the Henrician and Marian parliamentary legislation and the first two Elizabethan proclamations that allowed those who served the royal household to be exempt.

In a society that endowed clothing with the power to visualize an individual’s socio-political and economic status, Elizabeth’s decision to formally allow her female attendants to dress above their station complicates historians’ understanding of the queen’s position regarding contemporary gender norms. Although Elizabeth is often

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94 Tudor Royal Proclamations, II, 191.
96 Tudor Royal Proclamations, II, 385.
97 Tudor Royal Proclamations, II, 138 In Elizabeth’s 1559 proclamation, she also allowed people to wear any garments that were otherwise denied them by law if they were gifts from the queen. This exception is mentioned after discussing clothes worn for jousts and before discussing clothes issued to soldiers—both of which are purely masculine activities. It is not until her 1562 proclamation that court women are mentioned specifically. It is not clear why court women’s dress was not discussed until 1562, especially since they are explicitly exempted in Henrician and Marian precedents.
judged to have held conservative opinions about the place of women in society which buttressed her argument that she could rule because she was an exceptional woman, she did codify a special space for a group of women, albeit, a rather small group of women, to exercise power not ordinarily prescribed to them. Susan Vincent, a costume historian, has tried to understand why women’s dress was so explicitly regulated in the 1574 proclamations unlike any of the earlier Tudor predecessors’ sumptuary legislation. Vincent attributes this to two things. First, a female monarch created a space for women at court to participate in matters of patronage and royal favor, which now took women’s dress from being a private concern to a public one, and therefore, in need of legislative control; and secondly, that by the 1570s as Elizabeth was coming to the end of her time on the marriage market, her “sensitivity to rivals of all sorts was becoming extreme.” Although Vincent is correct to see a correlation between clothing and power at the Elizabethan court her argument is problematic on many fronts. In addition to drawing an anachronistic line between the private and public that did not exist in early modern English society, she also disregards the fact that female courtiers had always participated in a variety of political activities, not just under Elizabeth. Moreover, by 1574 it was still not clear that Elizabeth would never marry as her last suitor was not rebuffed until 1582. The critical flaw, however, is that Vincent’s assertion that the later Elizabethan sumptuary legislation was meant to control the queen’s rivals at court ignores the fact that Elizabeth exempted these very women from the law.

Vincent 136-39.
Part of the problem with Vincent’s argument is that she accepts Pam Wright’s argument that the privy chamber women’s participation in the courtly patronage system was divorced from high politics. By focusing upon a very narrow definition of what constituted political activity at court, she too easily misses the various ways late medieval and early modern aristocratic and court women constructed political careers at court and in the country as argued by Barbara J. Harris, English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
Perhaps the interpretation should be based not in terms of Elizabeth trying to limit her female courtiers’ dress, but of her attempt to protect their special status. The queen was acutely aware that much of her royal prerogative rested upon the foundation created by the more general set of aristocratic privileges. Celebrating the royal Maundy service provided Elizabeth with an opportunity to use her body and clothes as well as those of her female attendants to demarcate and uphold the special status of both the monarchy and the aristocracy. This religious service was conducted on the Thursday before Easter Sunday. Its purpose was to reenact Jesus washing the feet of his twelve apostles during the Last Supper. During the Middle Ages, the royal Maundy ceremony developed and came to include the act of the king washing the feet of poor people to demonstrate his humility before God while simultaneously drawing a parallel between himself and Jesus Christ. Henry VII had revived this medieval ceremony to use the divine aspect of monarchy demonstrated by this religious ritual to help legitimize his new dynasty. By the time Elizabeth came to the throne the Tudor Maundy ritual had been established so that the number of poor people who had their feet washed matched the age and sex of the monarch. In addition to the foot washing, the poor would also receive money, shoes, material for clothes, and the poorest individual would receive the outfit worn by the monarch during the ceremony.

Elizabeth’s approach to the Maundy has been captured in both a written description of one service in 1573, and in a miniature believed to be painted by Levina Teerlinc, a gentlewoman of Elizabeth’s privy chamber. The Maundy miniature depicts

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100 Haigh 51, discusses how “by convention, the nobles were the family of the monarch.” McManus, “Queen Elizabeth, Dol Common, and the Performance of a Royal Maundy,” 192, 197.
102 Levin 22-24.
the queen and her female attendants fulfilling their roles in the church ceremony.

Although this ceremony was supposed to show Elizabeth’s Christ-like humility by washing the feet of her most indigent subjects, the clothing and other items used by the queen and her women in this service, did more to accentuate their privileged status than to downplay it. One eye-witness’ account of Elizabeth’s 1573 Maundy, illustrates how Elizabeth’s queenly status was projected throughout this ceremony:

A little beneath the midst whereof, and beneath the foot pace, a stool and cushion of estate was pitched, for her Majesty to kneel at during service time. This done, the holy-water basons, alms, and other things, being brought into the Hall; and the Chappelan and poor folks having taken their said places, the Yeomen of the Laundry, armed with a fair towell, and taking a silver bason filled with warm water and flowers, washed their feet, all . . . After him, within a while followed the Sub-Almoner, doing likewise, and after him the Almoner himself also; then, lastly, her Majesty came into the Hall, and, . . . ladies and gentlewomen . . . addressed themselves with aprons and towels to wait upon her Majesty; and she, kneeling down upon the cushions and carpets under the feet of the poor women, first washed one foot of every of them . . . as the Almoner and others had done before.

Jesus may have taken off his robe before he washed the feet of his disciples, but Elizabeth and her women put on more garments, towels and aprons on top of the sumptuous dresses. In the miniature Elizabeth wears a beautiful blue dress which also has a long train held by a noblewoman dressed very similarly to the woman holding the queen’s train in the Eworth portrait. The woman who holds Elizabeth’s train in the Teerlinc miniature wears no apron, indicating that she is only there to serve the queen, not to help wash the poor women’s feet. Elizabeth’s clothes and her beautifully dressed female retinue highlighted the queen’s elite status over the poor women. Moreover as the 1573 account states, the function accorded to Elizabeth’s female attendants was “to wait

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upon her Majesty.” Even though the act of washing poor women’s feet was meant to show Elizabeth’s humility, she did so while “kneeling down upon the cushions and carpets,” which in addition to having the poor women’s feet washed three times before the queen ever touched them, lightened her physical exertion. The end result was that as Elizabeth, while beautifully dressed, kneeling on rich carpets and cushions, attended by a retinue of female attendants, washed the clean feet of poor women, she did not exert as much an image of humility as she did of royal majesty.  

Elizabeth did make one striking innovation to the Maundy ceremony. Traditionally the monarch gave away the outfit worn during the ceremony to the poorest person. According to the 1573 account, Elizabeth decided to not give away her dress, but rather, she gave away “red leather purses, each containing twenty shillings, for the redemption of her Majesty’s gown, which . . . to avoid the trouble of a suit . . . had changed that reward into money, to be equally divided amongst them all.” Although the queen may not have wanted to try to discern which woman was the poorest, it could also be interpreted that Elizabeth did not want to give away her royal status which was imbued, and to some extent fashioned by, her garments. As one scholar has posited, “Elizabeth’s reluctance may have . . . reflected her determination to control the proliferation of her royal image.” This connection between the queen’s clothes and royal representation needs to be further explored. It is quite plausible that Elizabeth would be very sensitive to the signals she would be sending out with such a royal gift. The dictates of Tudor sumptuary law allowed people to wear garments and materials otherwise forbidden to their social class if it came from the monarch. Elizabeth may have

106 The Progresses and the Public Processions, I, 326-27.
wanted to limit the number of women she allowed to, in a sense, dress like a queen, especially if one of her main claims to power was her exceptionality. 108

The queen’s reluctance to give her clothes away to poor women throws into greater relief the sartorial privileges she extended to her female courtiers, especially the women of her privy chamber, to whom she regularly gave gifts of clothes. As discussed in the previous chapter some of these sartorial gifts had been worn by Elizabeth herself. Moreover, Elizabeth allowed her privy chamber women to wear clothes that would have been denied to them by their natal or marital social status, even if these garments were not gifts from her. One of the reasons Elizabeth may have allowed her serving women to dress above their social status, indeed at times like a queen, was because she used them to extend her royal presence and represent her both inside and outside of the palace walls. The Eworth portrait and the Teerlinc miniature illustrated how the bodies and clothes of Elizabeth and her female courtiers functioned to blur the sartorial and corporeal lines separating them. In the drawing of *Elizabeth Receiving Dutch Emissaries* we can also see how Elizabeth is able to augment her royal presence through the positioning and clothing of her female courtiers. Although this picture is based upon an imaginary scene, it still shares common elements with the Eworth portrait, the Teerlinc miniature, and (as we will see) the Gheerarts I’s portrait of Elizabeth I.

The anonymous drawing places Elizabeth standing before two kneeling ambassadors. On one side of the wall are Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Earl of Leicester, among other courtiers. In the corner are a group of three young women. Again, the dress

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108 If Elizabeth did discontinue the custom of giving her dress to the poorest woman in attempt to control the dissemination of her image, this fits in with her and her government’s struggle to control the reproduction of her painted or engraved image, see Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987; reprinted Pimlico, 2003), 12, 14.
of the queen and her female attendants is of great importance. The majority of the figures are dressed in black or dark colors. Although both ambassadors have colorful cloaks, most of their outfits’ garments appear to be black. The figures whose costumes are the most colorful, and thus, the most prominent, are Elizabeth and her women. The female attendant who is the furthest of her female counterparts from the queen is wearing a dress that is very similar to Elizabeth’s. Even though the female attendants are placed in the corner of the composition, their position behind the ambassadors may not signal their unimportance, but rather their ability to augment the queen’s royal presence. The three women in the corner, dressed in bright clothing, enable Elizabeth who stands before the Dutch ambassadors while her women sit behind them, to envelop the ambassadors in her monarchical power. It is only with the bodies and dresses of her female attendants that Elizabeth can exert her power so completely.

Just as in the picture of Elizabeth receiving the Dutch ambassadors, court women’s ability to augment Elizabeth’s power and reinforce her monarchical superiority is also present in the Teerlinc miniature and the Eworth portrait. In the miniature, Elizabeth’s female retinue sets the queen apart from the poor women and upholds the queen’s royal status, neutralizing the religious ritual’s potential power to humble the queen before her lowlier subjects. Elizabeth, her women, and their clothes make this religious ceremony a means to confirm the queen’s majesty and divine approval. The Eworth portrait of Elizabeth demonstrates the queen’s superiority over the three Classical goddesses, in part, because of her ladies’ ability to augment Elizabeth’s authority. As in the miniature, the Eworth portrait has one serving woman physically connected to the queen by holding her train; moreover, the queen and her two female attendants are all on
the same step which physically raises them above Juno, Pallas, and Venus. In all three of these images, clothing binds together the queen and her serving women, which allows Elizabeth to extend and multiply her royal presence and authority.

The sartorial privileges and power of Elizabeth’s female courtiers reveal the two-way connection that existed between the queen and her female servants. Elizabeth offered a space of privilege to the women who attended her which endowed these women with status and influence, and in return, Elizabeth could appropriate the bodies of her court women to extend her monarchical presence outside of Elizabeth’s immediate, physical reach.109 Allowing her women to act as queenly surrogates enabled Elizabeth to not forgo opportunities to build ties to her subjects or to other foreign powers, even if she knew she could not attend herself. One of the ways Elizabeth appropriated the bodies of her women to extend her royal reach was by delegating her court women to stand in for her at the christenings of children for whom she was godmother. As David Cressy has discussed, christenings were the Christian sacrament which ritually incorporated a newborn into the larger spiritual and social community.110 Part of the ritual required that godparents, people other than the biological parents, would act as the child’s spiritual and secular guardians. Tradition required two godmothers and one godfather for a baby girl and two godfathers and one godmother for a boy. Some Protestant reformers rejected the idea of godparents as a Catholic, and therefore, heretical invention, but most Protestants accepted the practice.111 The ritual purpose of the godparents was to speak on the child’s behalf.

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109 Brown 131-132, also sees the privy chamber women functioning in these capacities, but she did not use this argument to analyze Elizabeth’s iconography or in terms of christenings.
111 Cressy 150.
when the minister asked the child to reject the devil and all of his works.\textsuperscript{112} The social duties of godparents were expected to continue outside of the church and throughout the child’s lifetime.\textsuperscript{113} Like all parents of all social ranks, courtiers and aristocrats very carefully chose the godparents of their children, hoping that they were attaching the family to important members of the ruling class which would (theoretically) give their child opportunities to raise themselves and their families into higher social, political, and economic circles.

Even if a godparent was too busy to attend the actual christening, they could ask a proxy to stand in for them.\textsuperscript{114} This made it possible for Elizabeth to accept as many invitations to act as godmother to children of court or aristocratic families as she wished without having to worry about being able to actually attend. Elizabeth’s ability to send a proxy permitted her and the child’s family to build mutual ties of loyalty. These ritual bonds were forged with the same intent and for the same purposes as the gifts exchanged between Elizabeth and her subjects.\textsuperscript{115} When the queen could not attend a christening, she often sent one of her privy chamber women to act in her stead. In accounts which record the amount of money spent throughout the year, there is a small section that deals with the christenings of the queen’s godchildren. Money was always given to the child’s nurse and midwife, for the setting up of the church where the christening took place, and for paying the expenses of the gentleman ushers who distributed the monies and ensured the

\textsuperscript{112} Cressy 153.
\textsuperscript{113} Cressy 156, 158-60.
\textsuperscript{114} Cressy 157-58.
\textsuperscript{115} Cressy 159-160, gifts were part of the Christenings too; the godparent was expected to give a gift, usually of gilt plate in the form of bowls, plates, or spoons. The New Year’s gift rolls often record the Christening gifts Elizabeth gave to the families for whom she acted as godmother to their newborn child.
church’s readiness. The gentlemen ushers were also paid to wait upon the queen’s surrogate, who was sometimes named, as in this 1592 account:

To Rich[ard] Conningsbie one of ye Ordinarie gentlemen vshers of her m[ajesty’s] Chamber to be by given, and Distributed by waye of her mate Ordinarie Rewarde to ye Nursse and Midwife at the Christeninge of ye Sr Horatio Palavina his Sonne to whom her matie was Godmother . . . and for makinge readie ye Churche and his house there for ye same . . . as also for attendinge ye Countis of Shrewsburie her highnes deputie in all by ye space of fower dayes.  

There are other records, such as letters which also clearly indicate that female courtiers were acting as the queen’s proxy and performing her actions. For example, on 15 October 1602, John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton that “the Earl of Northumberlands sonne was Christened at Essex house, the Q[ueen], by Lady Marquise [of Northampton] her deputy, being Godmother, and the L[ord] Treasurer and L. Admiral Godfathers.”

The language of this account tells us that Elizabeth was able to attend the christening of the godchild through the Lady Marchioness, who acted as the queen. In another letter, the language is even more explicit: “The queen Christened the French ambassador’s daughter by her Deputy the Lady Marquess.” Therefore, Elizabeth used the bodies of her female courtiers to act on her behalf at both the christenings of the children of her nobility and of those of foreign ambassadors, revealing that the ability of Elizabeth to utilize her female courtiers’ bodies was a political tool used on both the domestic and the international level.

These accounts which kept track of the monies distributed to the gentlemen ushers for the various expenses accrued for a christening sometimes name the women who acted

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116 TNA, E 351/542 173f.
117 SP 12/285/59r. Although Carleton does not specify which noblewoman, TNA E351/543 f.96d does list that it was the Lady Marchioness of Northampton who acted as the queen’s proxy.
118 The Progresses and the Public Processions, III, 602. TNA, E351/543 96d also states that it was Helena, Marchioness of Northampton who baptized the French ambassador’s child in Elizabeth’s behalf.
on behalf of the queen. According to the accounts for the fiscal year of September 1572 to September 1573, women acted as the queen’s deputies at the christenings of royal godchildren on two different occasions. One entry states that the gentlemen ushers were paid to set up the christening of Lady Pagett’s daughter and to attend upon the “Ladie Sandes” who acted as the queen’s “Deputie.” Another entry for the same year noted that the Lady De La Ware acted as the queen’s deputy at the christening of Sir Henry Ratcliffe’s daughter. If Lady Sandes was Elizabeth Sands, Lady Berkeley and the Lady De La Ware, Anne Knollys-West, Baroness De La Ware, then both women were currently serving in Elizabeth’s privy chamber. Other women who represented the queen at other christenings were Helena Gorges, Marchioness of Northampton; Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury; Anne Russell-Dudley, Countess of Warwick; and Lady Lincoln. Most, if not all, of these women had served in the privy chamber at some point in their court careers. None of the accounts indicated that these women were financially compensated for their time and travel in any way, but they did have the gentlemen ushers to attend them, a task that would have presumably been performed for

119 TNA, E 351/541 152d. The full phrase describing Lady Sandes’ role was “the Qe Mte Deputie.”
120 TNA, E 351/541 152d.
122 It is unclear if the Countess of Shrewsbury listed in TNA, E 351/542 173f. was the dowager Countess of Shrewsbury, who was Elizabeth Talbot or Elizabeth’s daughter, Mary, who married her step-brother, Gilbert Talbot who inherited his father’s title of Earl of Shrewsbury in 1590. According to Mary S. Lovall, Bess of Hardwick: Empire Builder (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 381-385 Elizabeth Talbot was at court and would have been available for such a serviced to the queen. It is not clear, however, which Lady Lincoln the account for 1582-1583, TNA, E 351/542 48f, which states a Lady Lincoln acted as the queen’s deputy. This Lady Lincoln was probably Elizabeth Clinton, Lady Lincoln who was married to Edward Fiennes de Clinton, first Earl of Lincoln. This Lady Lincoln served in Elizabeth as a member of the privy chamber from 1559 until 1585. For more information see Anne Dufton, “Clinton, Edward Fiennes de, first Earl of Lincoln,” ODNB, XII, 135 and Susan Bridges, “Clinton, Elizabeth Fiennes e [née Fitzgerald] Countess of Lincoln,” ODNB, XII, 136-137.
the queen. In a sense, these women who could act like the queen and wear the queen’s clothes were treated like a queen, at least for the day.

These accounts in conjunction with the visual images which depict the queen alongside female courtiers reveal the ways in which the queen could appropriate the bodies of her privy chamberers and other female courtiers to exercise her monarchical authority. The images of *Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses*, *The Elizabethan Maundy*, and *Elizabeth I Receiving Dutch Emissaries* visually express the ways in which Elizabeth’s female attendants could amplify her royal presence to awe Classical goddesses, poor English women, and Dutch ambassadors. In addition to those images, there is another portrait of Elizabeth by Marcus Gheerarts I, painted around 1585, which places the queen alongside other women, and arguably represents the power of court women to extend Elizabeth’s royal presence and monarchical authority to places where the queen did not reside. By being able to represent Elizabeth outside her palace walls, the queen’s female attendants could act as bridges connecting Elizabeth, and spreading her royal authority, to vast networks of subjects outside the court. In the Gheeraerts’ portrait, Elizabeth is painted as an allegorical personification of Peace, indicated by the olive branch she holds in her left hand and the sheathed sword that lies in front of her feet. The same sword decorated with her royal arms and a Tudor rose also acts as the sword of state and signifies royal justice. Thus the sword of state in conjunction with the throne upon which the queen leans, and behind which the cloth of state hangs, declares Elizabeth a queen regnant. To the queen’s right, there is an opening, possibly a doorway, leading outdoors into a walled garden. On the threshold of the door separating the throne

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room from the garden two female courtiers stand talking to a male courtier, possibly Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Further behind this trio is a guarded gate through which two more women are passing into the garden.

This portrait contains many symbols which can often be read in two opposing ways. As Stephen Orgel has noted, Renaissance symbols, such as emblems, often had no one inherent meaning which resulted in multiple and contrasting messages. For example, in the Gheeraerts’ portrait, the dog standing at Elizabeth’s feet could be representing fidelity, usually in terms of marriage, thereby presenting Elizabeth as the faithful wife married to her kingdom, but the dog running in the garden could represent sexual carnality perhaps hinting that the women in the garden were sexually available. Even the enclosed garden is an ambiguous symbol. Stemming from a medieval artistic and literary tradition, the enclosed garden often represented the Virgin Mary, whose womb, although never penetrated by a man was fruitful and bore the son of God. Elizabeth’s iconography often borrowed elements from Marian imagery, and thus, by representing Elizabeth in a dress, which encases her body, and is covered with a flower motif echoing the enclosed garden that stands behind her, the artist portrays the queen as

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124 It is possible that she is represented as the allegorical figure peace to celebrate her military intervention in the Netherlands to help the Dutch Protestants overthrow Catholic Spain. Gheerarts was working in the Netherlands around the time Dudley led the English military intervention, which is why the male figure behind Elizabeth may be the Earl of Leicester, see Cooper, entry for item “196, Portrait of Elizabeth I, c.1585,” 193.
126 McManus, “Reading the Margins,” 27.
127 Stuart Stanley, The Enclosed Garden (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 37-50, discusses that medieval and Renaissance paintings depicting the scene of the Annunciation (when God sent an angel to tell Mary, that although she was a virgin would conceive and bear His son) often contained an enclosed garden somewhere in the composition.
a virgin, but one who will still provide an heir for her kingdom. Despite the garden representing virginity, in the Renaissance it had also become notorious as a place for secret, often adulterous liaisons. And as previously discussed, sex scandals and clandestine marriages between her privy chamber women and her male courtiers sporadically punctured the Virgin Queen’s reign. It is possible that the portrait highlights Elizabeth’s virginity by juxtaposing her body, which symbolizes an enclosed garden in and of itself, against the bodies of her women who are in the garden, but a garden for sexual recreation indicated by their fraternizing with a male courtier.

A tradition has evolved around this portrait connecting it to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and identifying the garden as the one at his home at Wanstead Place. What scholars know for certain is that this portrait was painted by Marcus Gheeraerts who was living in the Netherlands from 1577 until 1586. The clothing worn by the figures in the portrait date the piece between the early to the middle of the 1580s, and Leicester fought in the Netherlands from 1585 to 1587, making it possible that Leicester commissioned the piece. At first glance, reading this scene as filled with erotic overtones seems applicable as Leicester was notorious for flirting with Elizabeth’s privy chamber women; he even fathered a child out of wedlock upon one of her privy chamberers, Douglas

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128 The exact year this portrait was painted has not been determined, although the consensus is circa 1585. However, Tabitha Barber for the entry of item “41, Elizabeth I, c.1580-5,” in Dynasties, 86-87 sets the date between 1580 and 1585. If it was painted before Elizabeth’s last suitor was rebuffed in 1582, it could be speaking to the fact Elizabeth might yet bear an heir of her body. However, Elizabeth also used symbols like the phoenix or the pelican to remind her subjects that she was a good mother to her country and would ensure that the monarchy would not die with her, even if she did not produce a child.

129 Some scholars such as Hammer “Sex and the Virgin Queen,” 77-99 argues that there was a rash of these scandals in the 1590s demonstrating the break down of Elizabeth’s monarchical authority.

130 Cooper entry for item “196, Portrait of Elizabeth I, c.1585,” 193; Barber 86-87.
Sheffield, and secretly married another, Lettice Knollys. However, it is important to keep in mind that if Leicester did commission this work, he may not have wanted to portray the female figures as sexually unchaste, after all at one point he had three sisters, Lady Mary Sidney, the Countess of Sussex, and the Countess of Huntington and a sister-in-law, the Countess of Warwick, at court attending the queen either as an official member of the privy chamber or as close friend and confidante. If Leicester did commission this work, it may not have been to portray the non-queenly female figures as sexual rivals, but rather, Leicester may be commemorating and celebrating the powerful members of his family, both himself and his female relatives.

Even if the portrait was not commissioned by the Earl of Leicester, it is still possible that these women are not only being portrayed as feminine contrasts to the queen. The garden was also a place where Elizabeth conducted important matters of state. When she and her government in the first year of her reign conducted marriage negotiations with the Austrian Hapsburgs, she, at least on one occasion, met with the Hapsburg ambassador in the garden. Augustin Guntzer, Secretary to one of the Hapsburg ambassador’s Count Helffenstein, reported one of his attempts to promote the Hapsburg marriage to the English queen:

I came to the Palace of the Queen. Surrounded by a host of brilliant maids of honor and the stately matrons of many famous courtiers, the august Queen came with awful majesty and royal bearing into the garden whither I had repaired and where the Queen’s Secretary received me officially, and having embraced me led me up to the Queen, The Queen having been apprised of my arrival by the Secretary, I stepped forward and fell on my knee. She with a smiling and pleased face extended her hand for me to kiss.

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133 McManus, “Reading the Margins,” 47-48.
According to the secretary, the queen conducted this very important piece of government business in one of her palace’s gardens. The fact that Elizabeth’s secretary “officially” received the Hapsburg secretary signals to the reader that this was not a chance or informal meeting. However, it was not only Elizabeth’s male court officials who set this imposing scene where state business was to take place. The Hapsburg secretary also commented upon Elizabeth’s impressive female entourage which, not unlike their painted representations in Eworth’s portrait, Teerlinc’s miniature, and the anonymous drawing of Elizabeth greeting Dutch emissaries, was part of Elizabeth’s awesome projection of majesty. Guntzer continues his official account of this meeting with Elizabeth by stating that he gave her a letter written by the Holy Roman Emperor whose son Elizabeth was considering as a potential husband. She took the letter and withdrew from the secretary and her courtiers going “to the farthest end of the garden, where she read and reread the letter.”

Elizabeth then signaled through her secretary to summon the Hapsburg secretary to join her in the far end of the garden, where the queen discussed the contents of the letter. Although the secretary tried to press Elizabeth for an answer she dismissed him without one and kept him waiting a few days before she summoned him again.

The scene which unfolds in the Hapsburg secretary’s letter is one where Elizabeth uses her body in the garden to either forestall or move forward the Hapsburg marriage suit. However, as in the case of some of the christenings of her royal godchildren, Elizabeth could not always use her body to conduct her royal business. In the Gheeraerts’s portrait, Elizabeth is the stationary figure as opposed to the two female figures moving through the garden’s gate. Although these women are in the far back of the portrait and their individual features cannot be made out, this does not relegate them

135 Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners 60.
to the margins or signal their triviality because their importance does not lie in their individual identities. Instead, these women were important because of their ability to represent the queen and act on her behalf, a power stemming not from their individuality, but from their collective identity as privy chamber women. Acting as the queen’s proxy at christenings was only one of the ways Elizabeth’s privy chamber women in particular, and court women in general, were able to connect Elizabeth to networks of subjects, and extend the queen’s presence outside of Elizabeth’s physical presence. In chapter two, these women often acted as “middlewomen,” passing on gifts from Elizabeth to a subject or a subject’s gift to the queen. Female courtiers, like the women in the Gheerarts’ portrait, were constantly moving between the queen and her subjects, providing both Elizabeth and her subjects with access to each other.

This idea of Elizabeth’s female attendants acting as portals through which one could gain access to the queen is a common element in all four images. The Eworth portrait, the anonymous drawing depicting Elizabeth greeting the Dutch emissaries, and the Gheeraerts portrait of the queen all position the women either coming through or placed by doors/entryways. Even though there is no clear doorway depicted in the Teerlinc miniature, one could argue that the eye’s entry point into the Maundy scene is the figure of the young woman in red who is positioned in the bottom center of the miniature. As Caroline McManus has pointed out, Elizabeth is not the figure in the foreground, but rather this young lady dressed in scarlet assumes this prominent position. However, the lady in scarlet does not look at the viewer; her attention is fixed upon the queen, which keeps her from distracting the viewer’s attention away from the queen and acts as a stepping stone that leads our eyes to the queen. Therefore, all of these images
laden with multiple meaning do contain symbols that speak to one of the most important functions Elizabethan female courtiers performed—connecting the queen to her subjects.

These four images also illustrate how the bodies of Elizabeth’s female attendants helped Elizabeth both fashion and project her royal authority, or to put it another way, her body politic. The Teerlinc miniature depicting an Elizabethan Maundy service may be a very deliberate celebration of the positive and empowering role female courtiers, especially the women of the privy chamber, may have played in shaping Elizabeth’s monarchical image. Levina Teerlinc was one of Elizabeth’s privy chamber women, and she often gave miniatures, often of the queen, as her New Year’s gift to Elizabeth. Teerlinc’s 1562 New Year’s gift to the queen was “the Quenes p[er]son and other p[er]sonages in a boxe finely painted,” and the marginalia of this roll stated that this gift was not given away or given to another woman to store away, but rather that it was “with her said maiestie.”

This gentlewoman of Elizabeth’s privy chamber often depicted the queen, not just as a lone figure in the compositions, but in groups, possibly performing other royal ceremonies. There are two other examples of New Year’s gift painted by Teerlinc, one that shows the queen participating in a procession with the knights of either the order of the Garter or the Bath, the other showing her on one of her royal progresses. Unfortunately, the descriptions recorded on the New Year’s gift rolls do

136 BL, Harleian Roll V.18.
137 The images to which I refer respectively are Society of Antiquaries, MS 538, which records 1568 Teerlinc’ 1568 gift of “a paper paynted” of Elizabeth and the knights of the Order, (leaving out which knightly order) and Folger, Z.d. 12 which records her 1564 gift to Elizabeth of a painted card with a scene from “a certayne Journey of the Quenes matie and the Trayne finely wrought.” Teerlinc painted Elizabeth alone as well as with other figures: In 1563 Teerlinc gave Elizabeth “a Carde wth the Quene matie” with other persons, TNA, C 47/3/38; In 1565 she gave Elizabeth “a howshe painted and theraboute certye parsonages in a case of a walnuttree,” Folger, Z.d.13; Teerlinc painted just “the Picture of the Quene her Maties whole stature drawne upon a Carde,” in 1567 BL, Additional MS 9772; Teerlinc’s 1575 gift to Elizabeth was another miniature depicting Elizabeth with other people, Folger, Z.d.14; Teerlinc’s last
not indicate if these group images included Elizabeth’s privy chamber attendants. Teerlinc’s contribution to the fashioning of Elizabeth’s royal image was not confined to the small miniatures she presented to the queen as New Year’s gifts. It is also believed that Elizabeth’s first Great Seal by Dericke Anthony, made in 1559, was based upon one of Teerlinc’s designs. Roy Strong has identified other woodcuts and images that were possibly based upon Teerlinc’s work, which helped to shape the monarchical image of the young Queen Elizabeth until Teerlinc’s death in 1576/7. By placing the Maundy miniature in the context of Teerlinc’s other work, it becomes plausible that Teerlinc used her skills and her position in the privy chamber to visually record the ways in which Elizabeth’s female courtiers helped to fashion the queen’s royal image, and by extension her royal authority. Surely, a woman who participated in the construction of the queen’s image and authority would not have recorded her court position, or those of privy chamber cohort who also participated in fashioning and spreading of Elizabeth’s image, as marginal figures at court.

**Alternative Queens**

Elizabeth’s female attendants were central, colorful figures who helped to construct, amplify, and extend their queen’s royal presence and authority. In the case of Levina Teerlinc, Elizabeth was able to use her privy chamber woman’s artistic talents to help shape her public persona as queen regnant. But we have also seen where the queen could use the bodies of her privy chamberers to accomplish the same task. Clothing often recorded New Year’s gift of another miniature portrait of Elizabeth to the queen was in 1576, BL, Additional MS 4827.

acted as both a reward for her women’s service, but also the means by which Elizabeth could appropriate and mark their bodies as her surrogate queens. However, as the anecdote about the rebellious maid of honor, Lady Mary Howard, demonstrated, female courtiers and privy chamberers sometimes resisted the queen’s attempt to sartorially and corporeally use them for her own purposes. Elizabeth had to present her physical body and public persona as a unique entity since she justified her unusual position as queen regnant by presenting herself as an exception to the gender expectations and roles of her age. Although Elizabeth did grant her privy chamber women sartorial privileges that permitted her women to dress above their birth or marital social status, sometimes even allowing them to dress in her old clothes, the queen had to make sure that these privileges and privileged garments were not used to attack her monarchical authority. Mary Howard used both her body, refusing to hold Elizabeth’s train or accompany the queen to church, as well as her clothing, considered too rich in the queen’s eyes, to challenge Elizabeth’s unique status. This section of the chapter will examine various episodes in which Elizabeth I and one of her former privy chamber women, Lettice Knollys, the Countess of Leicester, were believed to have used their bodies and clothes to compete for power. By examining these incidents, historians can begin to understand that the ways in which Elizabeth and her female courtiers dressed and used their bodies affected the queen’s ability to exert her monarchical authority.

As discussed in chapter two, Lettice Knollys permanently lost the queen’s favor that she had held at the start of Elizabeth’s reign upon the queen’s discovery of her 1578 secret marriage to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the queen’s favorite. Although Elizabeth did forgive Dudley, and his status as one of the most important members of her
court was rather quickly re-established, his marriage did at times complicate his relationship with the queen. Dudley’s marriage to Lettice was definitely a weakness that his enemies at court could manipulate to their advantage. One example of this is the way his military campaign in the Netherlands was affected by rumors about his wife’s behavior back in England. After nine years of refusals and excuses, in September 1585, the queen finally granted Dudley permission to lead an army in the Netherlands to support the Protestant Dutch rebellion against Catholic Spain. Elizabeth, however, believed the project to be suspect from its inception and consistently sent order after order minimizing Leicester’s authority. Despite the fact that Leicester was Elizabeth’s favorite, during the Netherlands expedition the two distrusted one another, both afraid the other would undermine their authority and agenda.\(^{140}\)

The queen’s fears of the earl acquiring too much autonomy were realized on 5 February 1586 when someone told her that Leicester had accepted the title of Governor-General from the Dutch without asking Elizabeth’s permission.\(^{141}\) Although the news angered Elizabeth, her full wrath was not unleashed until a rumor of Leicester’s wife’s behavior came to the queen’s ears. In a letter dated 11 February 1586, one of Leicester’s agents, Thomas Dudley, wrote to the earl:

> It was told hir majestie that my ladie was prepared presentlye to come over to your excellencie, with such a trayne of ladies and gentylwomen, and such ryche coches, lytters, and side-saddles, as hir majestie had none suche, and that ther should be suche a courte of ladies, as shuld farre passe hir majesties court heare.

This informacyon (thowghe most falce) dyd not a lytle sturre hir majestie to extreme collour and dislike of all your doynges there, saying, with great othes,
she would haue no more courtes under hor obeisance but hir own, and wold revoke you from thence with all spede.\textsuperscript{142}

This report of Leicester’s wife preparing to join her husband to set up a rival court in the Netherlands where the countess and the earl could play at king and queen was the last straw for Elizabeth. It took weeks for her privy councilors to calm Elizabeth down and keep her from insisting that Leicester publicly renounce his title.

It is easy to dismiss this anecdote as merely an example of a vain, aging, unmarried queen’s viciousness against the women who won the hearts of her male courtiers. However, I believe that this story serves as a window through which historians can view the ways in which women were involved in the shaping or challenging of the sartorial and corporeal elements that constituted monarchical power. It is quite striking that Elizabeth was so threatened by a rumor about a woman “with such a trayne of ladies and gentylwomen” who would establish “such a courte of ladies as shuld farre passe hir majesties court heare.” Elizabeth’s authority and majesty appear to be attacked primarily by the countess’ aping of a royal progress which included female courtiers and “such ryche coches, lytters, and side-saddles, as hir majestie had none suche.” The queen’s and the countess’ greatness was here not measured in terms of male courtiers and troops, but in terms of female attendants, coaches, and saddles. This example suggests that female courtiers comprised an integral component of the kinds of spectacular display that demonstrated Elizabeth’s power and that she had to regulate how much power other women could publicly display so that they could not challenge her authority. Such moments of conflict between the queen and her women as depicted in Dudley’s letter to

\textsuperscript{142} Mr. Thomas Dudley to the Earl of Leicester, 11 February 1586 in John Bruce (ed.), \textit{The Correspondence of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester During His Government of the Low Countries, in the Years 1585 and 1586}, The Camden Society (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1844), 112.
Leicester, provide an opportunity to explore how the economy of power at court often manifested itself in the bodily interactions between the queen and her female attendants. Women’s bodily gestures and exchanges such as kisses or clothing mapped out social and hierarchical relationships between them.¹⁴³ And this is precisely why contests over who dressed how at court were so crucial to Elizabeth’s ability to protect and maintain her monarchical authority.

Like the rumor about Lettice’s attempt to set up a rival court in the Netherlands, the stories about the confrontations between the Countess of Leicester and the queen often come from tracts written to vilify the Earl of Leicester. My purpose in using these libels is not to treat them as sources providing historical facts, but to examine their anecdotes concerning Elizabeth’s interactions with Leicester and his countess to discuss the ways in which gender, clothes, and bodies shaped and reflected early modern ideas about queenship. Two of them in particular, *The Copy of a Letter written by a Master of Arts of Cambridge* (1584), commonly known as *Leicester’s Commonwealth*, and the second known as “The Letter of Estate,” (1585) were written by two different groups who were disaffected with the Earl of Leicester for very different reasons. *Leicester’s Commonwealth* is believed to have been produced by several Catholic ex-courtiers with Charles Arundel, who was exiled in Paris, being the chief writer.¹⁴⁴ It is a piece of

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Catholic polemic, and its main purpose is to blame the Reformation on new men at court
who used their new religious heresy to start a political revolution at the expense of the
ancient, orthodox nobility.\(^{145}\) Although “The Letter of Estate,” shares many stories with
“Leicester’s Commonwealth,” it is considered an independent libel written by someone
who was an enemy of Leicester but was not a Catholic.\(^{146}\) Both pieces rail against
Leicester’s alleged monopoly of the queen’s favor which he purportedly abused for his
own profit. They also share another important factor: both incorporate stories of Lettice
challenging the queen’s supremacy and threatening to supplant Elizabeth on the throne.
Moreover, many of these examples of Lettice’s queenly ambitions revolve around her use
of clothes.

One of the main devices used in these libels to demonstrate the earl’s arrogance
and ambition to rule England was to couple him with an equally rapacious female
counterpart, his second wife, Lettice Knollys. In “The Letter of Estate” their mutual and
compatible malevolence makes them not only sexual partners, but partners in trying to
overthrow the power of the queen: “But now who but his Lordship in the corte, and as
pride and ambition hee paste, so in like manner wedded he in every degree with a
Countess fitting hir [husband’s] humor, for more like a princes then a subje[ct in the]
corte.”\(^{147}\) This part of the libel sets up the countess as both ambitious and filled with
pride, a woman who believed herself to be a princess at court, not a subject. Clearly this
is going to pit the countess against the queen since Elizabeth had justified her right to rule

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\(^{145}\) Adams 268.

\(^{146}\) Peck, “‘The Letter of Estate,’” 23.

\(^{147}\) “The Letter of Estate,” as reproduced in D.C. Peck, “‘The Letter of Estate’: An Elizabethan
Libel,” *Notes and Queries* 28:1 (1981), 20. In this printed version the words in the brackets are Peck’s.
in part upon the premise she was an exceptional, unique woman. Moreover, Elizabeth used her dress and her body to fashion these claims. As Leicester gains more power over Elizabeth and her court, Lettice starts to challenge Elizabeth’s position on the throne.

According to the libel, the countess,

who seing her lorde to be [master over] all the nobilitie and con[ceiving well that;] they durste doe nothinge and that as it were they had him att a becke, thought in like sorte all this were nothinge if she in like sorte had not all the [other goo]d counteses in the court att the like stay, and therefore in all that ever she might [she] practised and devised to effecte the same, in so [much] as if [ever once] hir Majestie were disposed for the entertainment [of some strange prince or embassador to have any new [gown mad]e hir she wilbe sure with[in] one fortnight, after, or att the leste afore the departure of the embassador, to have an other of the same sorte and fation sutable in every degree with hir Majesties and in every respecte as costly as hir Majesties, if not more costly and sumptuus than hirs.  

In this passage, Lettice mirrors her husband’s strategy to gain power at court. Just as Leicester dominates the male nobles and courtiers, Lettice schemed to have all the “counteses” at her beck and call. Like the rumor about the countess preparing a royal progress to the Netherlands, this libel sets Lettice up as a rival queen. Moreover, Lettice does not nakedly wield her power, but dresses it up. The libel’s countess makes sure to find out what Elizabeth is wearing and to get either a replica created or something even “more costly and sumptuous” than the queen’s outfit. These queenly clothes are not worn at some alternate court that Lettice has set up away from Elizabeth, but rather, Lettice publicly competes with Elizabeth at important state occasions such as the hosting of a foreign ambassador. In many ways this libelous attack perverts the drawing of Elizabeth I Receiving Dutch Emissaries that was made around the same time as this libel was created. Whereas the drawing clearly positions Elizabeth as queen—she is standing, and the ambassadors are not confused as to whom to pay homage—the libel’s ambassadors...
were faced with two women dressed exactly alike or with a situation in which the true queen was out-dressed by the rebellious countess. In the anonymous drawing, the queen’s female attendants are dressed in clothing similar to the queen, but in a manner that augments Elizabeth’s majesty, not in a way that eclipses it. “The Letter of Estate” has Lettice not only upsetting the domestic balance of power by acting as a second queen, but making an international claim to the throne of England.  

The libel continues with Elizabeth no longer being able to tolerate the countess’ insubordination. Instead, her intollerable pride hir Majestie notinge, after some admonitions for it and the same slightly regarded, tould hir as one sone lightened the yearth, so in like sort she would have but one Quene in Englande, and for hir presumption takinge hir a whirit on the eare in plaine terms strictly forbad her the corte.  

Elizabeth’s first response to the countess’ sartorial pride was to admonish her. Although this is an anecdote with little historical veracity, the incident with Lady Mary Howard, recorded in a letter by John Harrington, does provide historians with an example of Elizabeth admonishing one of her sartorially rebellious serving women. In the case of Lady Howard, the queen put an end to her maid’s sartorial transgressions by putting the maid’s dress on her own body. When the queen, who was apparently taller than her maid, asked how she looked in Howard’s dress, the maid of honor was forced to acknowledge the dress was too short for Elizabeth, who retorted, “Why then, if it become not me, as being too shorte, I am minded it shall never become thee, as being too fine; so it fitted

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149 In some ways, the libel’s presentation of the Countess of Leicester challenging Elizabeth’s supremacy on the English throne both in England and abroad in many ways mirrors the actions of Mary, Queen of Scots, see John Guy, *The True Life of Mary Stuart Queen of Scots* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004).

neither well.”\textsuperscript{151} Elizabeth’s royal body was able to remind the body of her maid of its proper place. However, admonitions were not enough to quell the countess’ pride. Instead, the queen had to inflict corporal punishment upon Lettice—she boxed her ears and then banned her body from the court.

Again, although this scene of the queen striking her rival and banning Lettice from court is surely an exaggeration if not an outright fabrication, Elizabeth had been known to physically and verbally abuse her female courtiers if they forgot their place. As discussed in chapter two, shortly after Elizabeth fell so seriously ill will smallpox some people worried about who would succeed the queen if she died and put forth her cousin, Henry Hastings, the third Earl of Huntingdon, as a possible candidate. Upon recovery, Elizabeth believed that both Hastings and his wife harbored pretensions to the throne. According to Hastings in a letter to Leicester, “At my wife’s last being at court to do her duty as became her, it pleased her Majesty to give her a privy nip, especially concerning myself, whereby I perceive she hath some jealous conceit of me.”\textsuperscript{152} Interestingly, Hastings sees Elizabeth’s treatment of his wife as a means to reprimand him. Although the bodies of female courtiers often acted as a bridge to connect queen and subject, a bridge over which favor was usually exchanged, female courtiers could also act as a conduit through which the queen and her subjects could challenge or punish each other. When Elizabeth gave a “privy nip” to the Countess of Huntingdon, the queen was also bestowing one upon her husband.\textsuperscript{153} However, the ways in which female courtiers

\textsuperscript{151} Letter from Sir John Harrington to Mr. Robert Markham, 1606 in \textit{Nugae Antiquae} I, 361-362.
\textsuperscript{153} The phrase “privy nip” is hard to translate. According to the \textit{OED} “nip” could refer to physically pinching someone or a sarcastic remark. “Privy” has multiple meanings including private, personal, and relating to sexual activities or the sexual organs. In the context of the earl’s letter, he seems to be referring to a sarcastic remark, but it is unclear how privately it was expressed as Clare Cross has interpreted it as
connected their husbands and other relatives to the queen was not always so straightforward. In “The Letter of Estate,” Elizabeth is able to identify Lettice’s villainy, but not Leicester’s; while Lettice is banned from court, her husband continues “insinuatiunge with hir Majestie, that upon him [as the] chefeste pillar in the land she wholly relies.” Although the example of Leicester and his countess does not provide an exact parallel to the Huntingdon case, it is interesting that the Earl of Leicester’s vilification is not complete—his wife is able to attack Elizabeth’s sovereignty in ways that Leicester himself cannot. Leicester’s takeover of the court is not complete until his wife supplants the queen.

In the libel *Leicester’s Commonwealth* the earl appears ambivalent about becoming king. Whether he, or one of his cohort, was king, did not matter since Leicester’s overarching goal was to control all the power; the title of king was irrelevant. Lettice and her relatives, however, keep voicing their desire to see him king and the countess queen. According to one passage, Lettice’s sister, Anne West, told a lady at court that “she doubted but that one day she should see her sister, upon whom the Queen railed now so much . . . to sit in her place and throne, being much worthier of the same for her qualities and rare virtues than was the other.” Lady West attacks the queen’s right to rule; Elizabeth is not the exceptional woman she presents herself to be but rather Lettice is the woman who possesses the “rare virtues” that makes a woman worthy of the throne. The countess also helped to inflame Leicester’s hate against the queen for the few

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155 *Leicester’s Commonwealth* 128.
times Elizabeth actually checked his power, especially over the earl’s marriage to Lettice. According to the libel, Leicester grew increasingly angry over

the disdain of certain checks and disgraces received at some times, especially that of his last marriage, which irketh him so much the more by how much greater fear and danger it brought him into at that time and did put his widow in such a frenzy as she raged many months after against her Majesty and is not cold yet, but remaineth as it were a sworn enemy for that injury, and standeth like a fiend or fury at the elbow of her Amadis to stir him forward when occasion shall serve.\textsuperscript{156}

Therefore, both libels present each member of this ambitious couple as desiring power, but they cannot achieve it in the same way. The Earl of Leicester is able to satisfy his lust for power by becoming the queen’s favorite. According to the libel, by poisoning his enemies, and by tricks, lies, and the manipulation of fear, Leicester has been able to bully the court so that no one can challenge his hegemony. He controls access to the queen and by extension is the only one who can influence her decisions. By becoming the “chefeste pillar” upon whom she totally relied, Leicester could manipulate the queen to reward him and his cronies. Leicester’s undying ambition as well as his wife’s might drive him to ultimately try to replace Elizabeth as monarch, but “whether he mean the crown for himself . . . it importeth not much, seeing . . . it is evident that he meaneth to have all at his own disposition.”\textsuperscript{157} Leicester can obtain the position of monarch, because by monopolizing Elizabeth’s natural body, he monopolizes England’s body politic.

The Countess of Leicester does not have the same access to the throne and its power as her husband does. A queen regnant includes the possibility of incorporating the body of a husband or a king into her body politic, or to be incorporated into the body politic of a king. As a woman, the countess can only possess the body politic by replacing Elizabeth’s body natural. The best tool Lettice has at her disposal is her wardrobe. If

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Leicester’s Commonwealth} 136.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Leicester’s Commonwealth} 127.
clothes helped to construct and identify a monarch, then Lettice’s equally or more costly dresses challenged Elizabeth’s supremacy to the point that the queen had to push the countess out of her court. In terms of the model of the monarch’s two bodies, there could never be two “natural” bodies claiming to be the monarch. Even at the funeral of a monarch, the heir could not be present until the defunct monarch’s natural body was buried and out of sight. The countess, with her fancy clothes, was burying the queen alive with yards of velvet, satin, and lace. Elizabeth with the statement “as one sone lightened the yearth, so in like sort she would have but one Quene in Englande” makes it clear that the countess was abusing her court position and perverting her sartorial privileges.158

Women who served Elizabeth could dress above their station, and dress in the queen’s old clothes as long as their bodies were acting as a royal representative of or incorporated into Elizabeth’s body politic to augment her royal majesty. Instead, Lettice was using her clothes to supplant the body of the queen, and therefore, had to be banned from court to ensure that there was only one queen at court.

This story of the Countess of Leicester being driven out of court to ensure that there would be but one queen in England has an interesting counterpart in a story concerning the Earl of Leicester. Sir Robert Naunton’s Fragmenta Regalia, first drafted around 1630, but not published until 1653, was one of the earliest printed accounts of Elizabeth’s reign, and it cast the Earl of Leicester as a power-hungry courtier who tried to monopolize power at court. Naunton’s work differs dramatically from the Leicester libels in that the queen never succumbs to Leicester’s influence. Fragmenta Regalia’s Queen Elizabeth is a powerful monarch who is able to successfully negotiate between the various factions that reside in Naunton’s reconstruction of the last Tudor court. Just as the

Leicester libels were a product of Catholic polemic or of frustrated courtiers who could not penetrate the inner circles of power. *Fragmenta Regalia* was a product of the Jacobean reign. Naunton constructed Elizabeth’s court, one in which a clever monarch was able to break power monopolies by controlling the faction at her court, to critique Elizabeth’s successor to the throne, James I, whom many believed was controlled by his favorites.\(^{159}\)

One of Naunton’s oft quoted (but uncorroborated) anecdotes that played an important part in constructing the myth of Elizabeth’s uncompromised monarchical power centered upon Leicester’s attempt to control access to Elizabeth’s privy chamber. According to Naunton, one of the Gentlemen ushers of the privy chamber, one Bowyer, had been charged expressly by the queen to “look precisely to all admissions into the Privy Chamber.”\(^{160}\) One day when a supporter of Leicester demanded admission into the privy chamber, Bowyer refused. Leicester then stepped in personally and

> Said publikely that he was a Knave, and [Bowyer] should not continue long in his office; and so turning about to go into the Queen, Bowyer . . . stept before him, and fell at her Majesties feet, related the story and humbly craves her Graces pleasure; and whether my Lord of Leicester was King or her Majesty Quee? Where unto she replyed . . .if you think to rule here, I will take a course to see you forth coming; I will have here but one Mistress and no Master.\(^{161}\)

In this scenario, the Earl of Leicester overstepped his bounds by trying to control access to the queen’s private chamber, the place where she dressed, ate and took care of her bodily needs. By assuming control over who had access to the privy chamber, Leicester tried to control who had access to the queen’s body—control only a king could hold over his wife, a queen consort. Elizabeth makes it clear here that there is no and will be no

\(^{159}\) Adams 280-282.


\(^{161}\) Naunton 7-8.
king, just “one Mistress” whose ability to rule is made evident in her ability to control her body and access to it.

These anecdotes, whether true or apocryphal, reveal how sixteenth-century people understood the gendered bodily manifestations of monarchical power. Elizabeth was a queen regnant and not a queen consort, because she was (theoretically) in control of her body and her dress as well as the bodies and clothes of the women around her. When a subject, either a man or a woman, challenged Elizabeth’s ability to corporally or sartorially demonstrate her sovereignty, Elizabeth had to take these challenges seriously and defuse them as quickly as possible. However, the gender of the monarch and the gender of the usurper changed the way in which the latter could gain power at the monarch’s expense. To be a queen regnant was to be a lone woman, better than and separate from other women. As Elizabeth demonstrated throughout her reign, in order to keep control over England’s body politic, her body natural was subject to restrictions that a male monarch’s body was not. Elizabeth’s natural body was powerful as long as it was not penetrated. One of the reasons Elizabeth and her privy councilor could never find the perfect husband-king for her, was due to their fears that Elizabeth’s duties to her husband would interfere with her duties to her kingdom. Even lawful sexual penetration by a husband held the possibility of weakening Elizabeth’s rule. Therefore, Elizabeth had to construct a public persona of a closed, self-controlled body to keep control over her body politic. Men could threaten Elizabeth’s rule by either penetrating her, which compromised her power, or by monopolizing access to her body. A man did not necessarily have to replace the queen’s body with his own to usurp her power. He could
either incorporate her political body when he married her or in some other way monopolize the natural body of the queen.

Women, on the other hand, offered different threats as well as possible defenses to Elizabeth’s two bodies. The only way women could possess Elizabeth’s body politic was to supplant and replace the queen’s natural body with their own. However, Elizabeth could appropriate the bodies of her female courtiers to protect, amplify, or extend her monarchical presence. A queen regnant’s power and its limitations were closely tied to her physical body. Elizabeth’s construction of queenship not only empowered and constricted her body, but also the bodies of the women who attended her. Privy chamber women, by taking care of the queen’s body, were positioned in a privileged space which allowed them at times to participate in Elizabeth’s construction and application of her monarchical powers. Although scholars are correct to claim that the queen and her serving women mutually constructed each other’s political identities, it is important to properly locate where this shaping took place. I do not believe that women had access to the power which enabled them to develop their own authoritative voice or their ability to shape Elizabeth’s definition and exercise of queenship from a marginal position at court. As I have shown, Elizabethan female courtiers, especially the women of the privy chamber had the power to either augment or challenge the queen’s sovereignty and public persona because of their central court position which surrounded the queen.

Moreover, it was often through clothing, which could both elevate bodies and limit bodily freedoms that Elizabeth and her female courtiers constructed and negotiated their positions of power. Elizabeth could use her old clothes, gifts of new clothes, or her royal prerogative to exempt her women from sumptuary legislation to blur the lines
between her body and the bodies of her women. These blurred lines permitted Elizabeth
to appropriate her female attendants’ bodies to help her project her royal authority to
places where she could not otherwise be. Sometimes, the natural bodies of Elizabeth’s
privy chamber women could represent the political body of the queen. However, if the
privy chamber wanted to fight Elizabeth’s attempt to appropriate their bodies, they could
also use clothing to separate themselves from the queen or even to challenge Elizabeth’s
supremacy. It is important to not confine the struggles between Elizabeth and her women
over clothes, bodies, and sex to the narrow category of sexual rivalry, but rather to realize
that they were a means to both construct and multiply Elizabeth’s monarchical body, and
that these queenly bodies could either extend Elizabeth’s royal persona and presence or
they could limit the extent of Elizabeth’s influence. Lastly, the women who closely
surrounded Elizabeth throughout her reign had the power to act as a queenly surrogate
and held the important role of custodian of the queen’s chastity which was crucial to the
single Elizabeth’s monarchical image and authority. Therefore, bodies, especially female
bodies mattered a great deal in the context of constructing what it meant for Elizabeth to
be queen and how she would exercise her monarchical power.
Chapter 4:  
Grave Histories: Female Funerary Monuments Writing Elizabethan Histories

While Henry Machyn furnished funeral trappings in London, he kept a diary from approximately 1550 until 1563. At first the diary only recorded the funerals he was hired to adorn according to the deceased’s social station.¹ As time went on however, Machyn noted much more than just funerals. He recorded the various changes in church services as the crown passed from the strict Protestant Edward to the Catholic Queen Mary I to the more flexible Protestant Elizabeth I. Machyn also described public activities such as Elizabeth’s coronation procession, meetings of parliament, and the reception of foreign ambassadors.

The entry for 26 March 1561 commemorates a rather extraordinary episode that combined his interest in public events with his professional interest in funerals:

The sam day of Marche at after-none at Westmynster [was brought] from the quen (’s) armere [almoner] my lade Jane Semer, with [all the quire] of the abbay, with ij C. of (the) quen (’s) cowrt, the whyche she was [one] of the quen(’s) mayd(s) and in grett faver, and a iiiij.xxx morners of [men and] women, of lordes and lades, and gentylmen and gentylwomen, all in blacke, be-syd odur of the quen(’s) preve chamber, and she [had] a great baner of armes borne, and master Clarenshux was the Harold, and master Skameler the nuw byshope of Peterborow dyd pryche. [She was] buried in the sam chapel wher my lade of Suffoke was.²

The funeral Machyn described was that of Lady Jane Seymour, a maid of honor to Queen Elizabeth. Interestingly, Machyn knew that Lady Seymour was a maid of honor and member of the privy chamber which speaks to at least some public recognition of these women’s court position. Even more striking for the historian is Machyn’s note that the
entire court attended this funeral. Lady Jane Seymour died young, at the age of nineteen and had only served the queen for two years as a maid of honor. Although the queen was not listed among those who attended the funeral, over two hundred people were there, publicly acknowledging the importance of this woman, her family, and her court position.

Machyn’s diary ends this segment by stating that Lady Jane Seymour was buried in Westminster Abbey. The diary entry does not record the epitaph on the funerary plaque erected by Lady Jane’s brother, Edward Seymour, the Earl of Hertford. Lady Jane’s burial at Westminster Abbey is commemorated with an alabaster wall monument (Figure 4.1) that has an inscription tablet placed between two Corinthian columns which support an entablature in the center of which is a shield of arms. On either side of the shield is a phoenix crest in a ducal coronet. Below the epitaph is another shield which repeats the arms above. The sculpture surrounding the inscription tablet frames this individual in terms of family and social station. The phoenix crest alludes to Lady Jane’s namesake, her aunt, Queen Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII. Henry VIII bestowed this crest upon the Seymour family to honor Queen Jane Seymour’s accomplishment in providing a male Tudor heir, Edward VI, although it cost the queen her life. The phoenix rests upon a ducal crown which refers to Lady Jane’s father, Edward Seymour who became Duke of Somerset and Protector of the minor King.

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3 Folger-Shakespeare Library, W.b.262 The Annals of the Seymours. According to the Folger card catalogue this four volume work was written c.1830 and copied c. 1892-1893.
4 The description of the monument came from Dr. John Physick’s unpublished Abbey Monuments from 1991, I, entry 271.
5 Anthony R. Wagner, Historic Heraldry of Britain: An Illustrated Series of British Historical Arms, with Notes, Glossary, and an Introduction to Heraldry (New York: Oxford University Press), 33.
Edward VI. The Duke of Somerset’s shield is incorporated (the top left and middle slots) in the larger shield of arms, which additionally incorporated both Lady Jane’s paternal and maternal shields. Without needing to read a word of the inscription, the tomb visually declares that this monument commemorated a member of the country’s elite social class.

The epitaph in gilded Roman letters reads,

The Noble Lady Jane Seymovr, Daugther To The Renowned Prince Edward Dvke Of Someset, Earle of Hertforde, Vicounte Beuchampe, And Baron Seymovr, And To The Right Noble Lady, Anne Duchesse Of Someset His Wyfe; Departed This Lyfe In Her Virginitie At Ye Age of XIX Yeares The XIX Daie of Marche A M.CCCCC LX, In the Seconde Yeare Of The Moste Happie Raigne of Qveene Elizabeth, And Was Honourablie Bvryed In The Floore Of This Chappel. To Whose Memorie, Edward Earle of Hertforde, And Baron Beavchampe, Her Deare Brother Hathe Cavsed This Monvment To Be Made.

Much of this inscription verbalizes the pictorial symbols concerning genealogy and social rank. This young woman’s importance is attached to her family’s impressive lineage: she is the daughter of a man who is described as a Prince, a Duke, an Earl, a Vicount and a

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6 Wagner discusses the Seymour shield on p.33 and has an illustration of it, no.70, plate 16.
Baron. However, Lady Jane in her own right is also linked with another queen, Queen Elizabeth I. Although Lady Seymour would have had an impressive heraldic funeral due to her rank, Machyn points out the reason why he believed the vast majority of the court attended the funeral: “with ijC. of (the) quen (’s) cowrt, the whyche she was [one] of the quen (’s) mayds(s) and in grett faver.” Courtiers attended Lady Jane’s funeral, because she was part of the queen’s court as a maid of honor to Elizabeth I and who had died in the queen’s favor. They were paying homage both to a fellow courtier and to the queen, acknowledging that Lady Jane held an elevated position at court, because the queen had elevated her. This funeral provided a space where the queen and one of her court women were able to mutually reinforce each other’s importance. By people paying tribute to a maid of honor, they were also paying tribute to the source of her power, the queen.

The name of Lady Seymour, the golden phoenix, and the carved connection of Lady Seymour to Queen Elizabeth surrounds the Seymour family with connections to the crown and testifies to their aspirations to be considered part of the royal family. This funerary monument constructed by her brother, Edward, Earl of Hertford, commemorated both his sister and his entire family. This tomb also illustrates that women often played the critical role of connecting families to the center of power, the monarchy and the court. Lady Jane Seymour was an acknowledged member of the privy chamber and favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, but it is also important to note that her very name came from her illustrious aunt, who achieved the position of Queen Consort. It was through Queen Jane Seymour’s marriage to Henry VIII that the Seymour family became part of the dynastic, and thus, the national history of England.
The inscription tablet is not only an example of what information is included to tell a specific family history, but also of what is excluded from the inscription and consequently the family history. One of the most important facts not recorded on this plaque was that Lady Seymour’s father, “The Renowned Prince Edward Duke of Somerset,” was executed in 1552 for plotting to imprison the Duke of Northumberland, seize the Tower, and agitate the people of London.7 By excising the execution of the Duke of Somerset, the Seymour family is able to construct a positive history that only celebrates its accomplishments while erasing any failures. Most importantly, it was the life and death of a female relative that provided the Seymours with an appropriate space to offer a revised family history that was connected to the larger national history of England.

Some historians do not consider genealogy to be a branch of history but, at most, a tool that can be used by historians. Consequently, family history is often conflated with genealogy and divorced from any larger historical narratives.8 The tomb monument of Lady Jane Seymour, however, challenges these assumptions. As discussed in the introduction, royal, aristocratic, and gentry families used portraiture and tombs to construct family histories. Although each tomb focused on an individual or a family, the way tombs were grouped determined larger histories. Just as the gentry’s long halls displaying a family’s collection of portraits told a particular history, so too did their...

8 Colin D. Rogers and John H. Smith, *Local Family History in England 1538-1914* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 2. Rogers and Smith stress that genealogy is essentially a personal endeavor. They also warn readers to avoid falling into local history which “is the black hole of amateur historical studies,” 4.
tombs in small churches and large cathedrals.⁹ These tombs are a nexus where individual, family, and local histories meet larger national histories. More importantly, it is often the effigy, memory, and life accomplishments of women that act as the lynch pin connecting these various historical planes to each other.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century funerary monuments acknowledged and celebrated the women who surrounded Elizabeth I during the queen’s reign. Moreover, these funerary monuments which were deliberately shaped to tell a particular history of the individual and/or family also constructed multiple representations of Elizabeth’s reign which have hitherto been ignored by modern historians. Many of her female courtiers appropriated the Cult of the Virgin Queen and of Elizabeth I as a model Protestant ruler, but other women and their families used their funerary monuments as sites to challenge England’s glowing memory of Elizabeth I.

Reformed Histories: The Reformation and the Changing Purpose of Tombs

Before discussing individual tombs, I must first explain the social conventions funerary monuments served in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century and their connection to the historical culture produced in the same period. As many scholars have discovered, the Reformation affected both the living and the dead. In the case of England, before the Reformation most aristocrats chose to be buried in monasteries or churches in their own chantries, which were small chapels where people would pray for

the soul of the deceased to limit the departed soul’s time in purgatory and help them enter into heaven more quickly. The Reformation, however, rejected both the concept of purgatory and the idea that the living could do anything to change the dead’s spiritual status; the dead and living were no longer connected in one community as they were in traditional Catholicism. This disconnect created a hole in the social fabric that had to be repaired. The combination of Reformation theology and royal legislation, which in 1547 made chantries illegal and dissolved the monasteries, had a concrete impact on how people chose to be buried and remembered.  

Once funerals and funerary monuments were stripped of many of their spiritual functions, they instead primarily became a vehicle to repair the tear in the social fabric left by the death of that member of the community. The chief tools used to smooth over this rupture in the community were the markers of social station. In England, the sixteenth century saw the zenith of grand heraldic funerals, where everything from how many mourners were present to what size funeral decorations could drape the church, to the location of the funeral service, were dictated by the College of Arms. For example, a baroness was entitled to have six female assistants to help the female chief mourner, whereas a gentlewoman could only have two assistants for the chief mourner. Even in

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death, the social status of the dead would be commemorated to reinforce the status quo of power relationships within that community.

The funerary monument was the last stage of a funeral, and the tombs were often constructed to recreate how the effigy had laid in state before the corpse’s burial. Nigel Llewellyn has also argued that funerary monuments were predicated on the idea that all humans had two bodies: the natural body that died and decayed and the social body that if commemorated, often in the form of a stone or wooden effigy, could live in perpetuity.\(^\text{13}\) To maintain the social body of the individual, their social rank and public persona had to be carefully commemorated.\(^\text{14}\) Just like portraiture, these tombs not only reflected an individual’s personality and life, but framed that individual in larger social terms: by rank and genealogy. In Lewellyn’s words, these funerary monuments, with all their heraldic devices, effigies, and inscriptions, “tied families, places and histories together in an apparently seamless web of continuity that still characterizes for so many people the local history of England.”\(^\text{15}\) Often, one of the strands that existed in this “web of continuity” connected local history to the center of power, the court. Since the tomb monument’s main function was to record the social status of the deceased, the source of their elevated status—their connections to the monarchy—was often acknowledged. Tombs were spaces which illustrated the connection between family/local history and the center of power and politics. Since the sixteenth century, funerary monuments were regarded as historical records that constituted both family and county histories; however, these tombs

\(^\text{13}\) Lewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, 37 explains that this is an extension of E.H. Kantorowicz’s theory of the King’s Two Bodies in *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).


\(^\text{15}\) Lewellyn, *The Art of Death*, 127.
transcended local history because they also recorded the link between county and country.\textsuperscript{16}

As noted in the introduction, portraiture has been established as a medium through which family histories could be told. Only recently have a few scholars begun to acknowledge tombs as a form of family history.\textsuperscript{17} Tombs should be taken just as seriously as portraiture because they utilize the same visual conventions and perform the same social function. Both use similar visual markers and combine image, text and heraldry to connect individuals to various social networks. For example, many portraits included the sitter’s coat of arms. The portraits of two sisters, Elizabeth Knollys, Lady Leighton painted around 1577 by George Gower and now at Montacute House, UK (Figure 4.2) and Lettice Knollys, the Countess of Leicester, also painted by George Gower circa 1585, now in the collection of the Marquis of Bath, included their natal family’s crest and badge of a white elephant, even though they are both painted after they had married.\textsuperscript{18} Women often used portraits in a way that commemorated both their

\textsuperscript{16} Llewellyn, \textit{The Art of Death}, 131 and Daniel Woolf, \textit{The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture 1500-1730} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96, argue that tombs were viewed as historical documents in the early modern period.


\textsuperscript{18} A reproduction of the Countess of Leicester’s 1585 portrait can be found in Jane Ashelford, \textit{A Visual History of Costume: The Sixteenth Century} (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1983; reprinted 1993), illustration number 106, found in the section of color plates between pages 72 and 73.
husband’s family (if the portrait were to be passed down to the children produced in the marriage) and their birth families as well. As noted in the description of Lady Seymour’s tomb monument, family crests were almost always included on the tomb monument. Whether on a tomb or in a portrait, heraldry often afforded women the opportunity to record their natal past within the history of their husbands’ families.

Another interesting example of a family history told in paint that celebrated the maternal line can be found in the portrait of *Elizabeth Griffin, her daughter Mrs. Markham, and the sixteen children of the latter*, painted c.1590 by an unknown British painter, and now located at Deane Park, Nottinghamshire, UK. Two female figures dominate the canvas. At the bottom of the painting sixteen small figures, ten male figures and six female ones, are all lined up in one row. There is a scroll in the top right hand corner that narrates the scene depicted below. According to the top portion of the scroll, the first figure dressed in widow’s garb denoted by the black veil, is “Elizabeth daughter of Sir Thomas Brudenell Knt. … first married to Riffe Griffen Esquire deseassed…who
was sonne and heare to Sr Thomas Griffin of Bradbooke hall and had issue by him one
daughter named Mary. Second she was married to Sr. raumes Smith esquire…in
Warwickeshire.” The words of the scroll read very much like a tomb’s epitaph, placing
the individual in a series of networks formed by her birth family and then the families
into which she married. Mary, the heir Elizabeth produced in her first marriage is the
second prominent figure in this portrait. The second half of the scroll succinctly
reiterates Mary’s personal history while telling the viewer that Mary has predeceased her
mother, “This is the loving memory of the aforesaid Mary, the onely daughter and heir to
Riffe Griffen and Elizab she was married to Thomas Markham esquire of Allerton in
Sherwood she had issue by him sixteen children wherof ten weare sonnes and six
daughters.” Elizabeth Griffen-Smith commemorated both herself and her daughter for
their earthly accomplishments: marrying well and producing heirs. One of the many
interesting aspects of this portrait is the depiction of Mary Markham’s children. With the
exception of what is presumably the eldest son, all the boys are like cookie-cutter copies
of each other and all the girls are also almost totally interchangeable. Some of the sons
wear a sash around their neck, and one of the daughters is painted with blonde hair
instead of brown. Other than a few small distinctions, there is very little to demarcate
individuals among the sons and daughters, yet I believe that is not due to the poor skills
of the artist. Although this portrait has not yet come under any scholarly scrutiny, the
mechanical depiction of the children makes sense when fit into the conventions of
funerary art.

In many ways this portrait functions like Lady Jane Seymour’s funerary plaque.
The scroll in the portrait states that this is in “lovinge memory” of Mary Marckham, and
it was customary in sculptured and painted funerary monuments to depict the deceased’s children as mourners, but to do so in ways that rendered the figures indistinguishable from each other. Two examples can be found in the St. John Triptych in the Lydiard Tregoz Church, Wiltshire, painted c.1615 by an unknown artist and the sculptured tomb of Sir Anthony Cooke and his wife, attributed to the sculpturer Cornelius Cure, located at St. Edward the Confessor Church in Romford, Essex and built around 1576.19 The portrait of Elizabeth Griffin-Smith, the St. John triptych and the Cooke Family tomb monument all have the sons on the left and the daughters placed on the right which was in accordance with the heraldic customs of the period. Heraldry dictated that the left was superior to the right, therefore, men were positioned on the left and females on the right.

The shared visual conventions of funerary monuments and portraiture also speak to their shared function, to create family histories. This ability of tombs to act as historical records for families was also acknowledged by the Crown. In 1560 Elizabeth issued a proclamation against any further defacement of funerary monuments by overly zealous Protestants. The reasoning behind this proclamation was as follows:

the churches and places remain at present day spoiled, broken, and ruined, to the offense of all noble and gentle hearts and the extinguishing of the honorable and good memory of sundry virtuous and noble persons deceased; but also the true understanding of divers families of the realm (who have descended of the blood of the same persons deceased) is thereby so darkened as the true course of their inheritance may be hereafter interrupted contrary to justice…20

These monuments needed to be protected from harm, because they were historical records that had important functions for the living. If the historical record was erased,
then people might not be able to prove their family lineage and consequently they would be deprived of their rightful inheritance. Tombs were historical records that connected individuals to each other and to family lands and money. By destroying these records, memories were not only destroyed, but so too were families, members “of the realm.”

Even though tombs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shifted away from acting as primarily genealogical records and were replaced with monuments that emphasized the individual’s secular talents and accomplishments, there remained a sense that these tomb monuments were actual historical documents. Lewis Theobalds considered tombs “abstracts of history,” from which one could study “many points in history, and the dates of occurrences.” Therefore, tomb monuments were a site of historical production.

However, these family histories were more than sources of pride in past accomplishments; they were also the vehicles through which property and wealth were passed, both of which were important cornerstones of English society, indeed of the “realm.” Families and their histories were not entities isolated from the larger workings of the country; the peace and prosperity of the realm would, in some part, rest upon the peace and prosperity of the realm’s subjects—both living and dead.

Moreover, as Daniel Woolf has pointed out, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there was “a growing public interest in the connection between families and external historical events.” Tomb monuments and genealogical claims were all manifestations of how families both learned about their nation’s past and

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21 This claim that the destruction of tomb monuments, either at the hands of men or through the passage of time and neglect, would injure the living due to the inability to read the genealogical information which then interrupted “the true course of their inheritance” was echoed again in “The Author to The Reader,” by John Weever, *Ancient Fynnerall Monvments Within the Vnited Monarchie of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the Islands adiavent...* (London: Thomas Harper, 1631).


23 Woolf 99.
appropriated it. Therefore, tombs were intended to act as historical records of an individual’s and a family’s history, and these histories were often linked to larger historical narratives. It is in this historical context that I will examine the tombs of some of the Elizabethan privy chamber women giving detailed analyses of the tombs of Blanche Parry; Catherine Grey; Helena, the Marchionness of Northampton; and Lettice Knollys, the Countess of Leicester.

“A maede in Courte and never no man’s wyffe”

On the 17th of February 1590, Thomas Markham wrote to George Talbot that, “On Thursdaye last Ms Blanshe a Parrye departed; blynd she was here on earth, but I hope the joys in heven she shall se.” Ten days after this letter was written, Blanche Parry had her funeral at the church of St. Margaret’s which is located directly in front of Westminster Abbey. Although Parry’s social rank was only that of a gentlewoman, Queen Elizabeth paid for Parry’s funeral and granted her the obsequies due a baroness. Blanche Parry has been mentioned briefly in other chapters, mostly focusing upon her role as a privy chamber woman involved with overseeing various aspects of Elizabeth’s wardrobe. Nonetheless, we need to explore how Parry could have earned the favor of a monarch to the extent of being treated better than her social rank would have otherwise allowed.

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24 Interestingly both Woolf and Natalie Zemon Davis have found that it was often women who were the keepers of family history and historical documents, see Davis, “Gender and Genre: Women as Historical Writers, 1400-1820,” in Patricia Labalme (ed.), Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 154 and Woolf 117.


The best way to start examining the career of Blanche Parry is to actually begin at its end. Parry left behind two tomb monuments: one at St. Margaret’s, Westminster and the other at St. Faith’s in Bacton, Herefordshire. These tombs tell us a great deal about the individual, Blanche Parry, and provide us with an insight into how she fashioned her identity as a female courtier. Even more strikingly, these tombs, especially the tomb in Bacton, also create a very specific image of Queen Elizabeth I. Therefore, these tombs can be read as historical documents intended to preserve for all of posterity the life and image of Blanche Parry, a female privy chamberer, and the image of the queen whom Parry served.

Inside St. Margaret’s Church, the effigy of Blanche Parry looks sternly out from the southwest wall (Figure 4.3). The monument is of marble and alabaster with a painted effigy of Parry kneeling on a cushion beneath an arched recess. A lozenge of her arms (not seen in the image) is positioned above the recess. The position of the monument on the southwest wall is not its original placement, and it has been moved more than once. 27 Unfortunately, the effigy’s hands have broken off, but the rest of the carving has managed to remain in good condition. The effigy is dressed soberly in a black gown with a modest neck ruff speaking both to her social rank as gentlewoman and to her age. Many younger women in her court position would have worn much grander, more up-to-date outfits with larger trunk sleeves, an open skirt revealing a rich petticoat, and more elaborate hairstyles. 28 The conservative dress would signal to her audience that this was

27 According to Llewellyn, Funeral Monuments, 152 Parry’s tomb was originally placed in the south chancel of St. Margaret’s, Westminster.
28 Jane Ashelford, A Visual History of Costume: The Sixteenth Century (London: B.T. Batsford, 1993), 101-118, gives a survey of English fashions from 1580-1590. Once women reached a certain age, it was no longer considered appropriate to dress in the latest fashion, and even well-off women of the gentry or middling classes often wore more conservative, older styles (Ashelford 105, 112). The outfit Parry wears was more typical of the fashions women wore in the 1570s.
Figure 4.3. Unknown Artist, Blanche Parry’s Funerary Monument, c.1595, St. Margaret’s Church, London, UK. Reproduced by permission of Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

an older, well-off gentlewoman’s funerary monument. Underneath Parry’s kneeling figure is a plaque with the following inscription:

Hereunder is intombed Blanche Parrye, daughter of Henry Parry of New Courte in the County of Hereford, Esquier, Gentlewman of Queene Elizabethe’s most honourble bedchamber and keeper of her Maties juells whom she faithfullie served from her Highnes’ birth. Beneficial to her kinsfolke and countrymen, charitable to the poore, insomuch that she gave to the poore of Bacton and Newton in Herefordshire seaven score bushels of wheate and rye yearlie for ever with divers somes of money to Westminster and other places for good uses. She died a maide in the eighte two years of her age the twelfe of February, 1589.29

The tomb’s inscription first lists her genealogical information and incrementally places Parry within larger and larger networks: self, family, county, court, country. After declaring who the effigy is, her parentage is discussed, stating that she was the daughter

29 The tomb was dated according to the old calendar. Parry died in 1590 according to the calendar we follow today.
of a gentleman in Herefordshire. Although no date of birth is given, since the tomb declared she was eighty two when she died in 1589/90, she was born sometime around 1508. After establishing her lineage, the inscription highlights her court career as a, “Gentlewoman of Queene Elizabethe’s most honourable bedchamber and keeper of her Maties iuells whom she faithfullie served from her Highnes birth.” In this passage Parry claims to have served Elizabeth from the time of her monarch’s birth, a claim she would reiterate on her second tomb epitaph. The claim that Parry served Elizabeth from birth cannot be proven with any official documentation, but there is a strong circumstantial case. In 1536, Parry’s aunt, Lady Blanche Herbert of Troy was the head of the three-year-old princess Elizabeth’s household, and so it is possible Lady Herbert introduced Parry to the court and into Princess Elizabeth’s household at this time.\(^{30}\)

How much time Parry spent with Elizabeth as a princess is uncertain, but it is quite clear how Parry served Elizabeth as queen. From the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, Parry was a gentlewoman of the privy chamber.\(^{31}\) From the start of the reign, Parry was second only to the chief gentlewoman of the bedchamber, Katherine Ashley, and she assumed the position of chief gentlewoman upon the death of Ashley in 1565.\(^{32}\) Parry chose to record one of her most important duties in the privy chamber, that she was keeper of the Queen’s jewels. As discussed in Chapter 2, this was an unofficial position

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\(^{31}\) Blanche Parry is listed in the Coronation Account book, TNA, LC2/4/3 f. 53 v. Although it does not say “Gentlewoman of the privy chamber, her name is listed under “the bedchamber” and listed above the category of “chamberers.” Therefore in the Coronation Account book, she was a gentlewoman of the bedchamber, and not a lady of the bedchamber as her social rank was only that of a gentlewoman, denoted with a “Mrs” before her name as opposed to “Lady.” The Coronation Account book also lists that the amount of cloth she was to receive to have the proper dress to serve Elizabeth on the eve of her coronation, f. 61 verso.

\(^{32}\) Bradford 6, 10; Peters, XLII, 864.
held in tandem with other women. Although the position of keeper of her Majesty’s jewels was not a position recognized in the Wardrobe of the Robe household accounts, it was important enough to Parry to state in stone for all to see. In addition to taking care of the queen’s jewels, Parry was placed in charge of any shipments or gifts of bolts of cambric or of fine linen. In both the New Year’s gift rolls and in the Wardrobe of the Robe accounts, Parry is listed as having been placed in charge of such commodities. For example, in a warrant dated May 1569, the queen ordered “that ye deliver or cause to be delivered vnto our welbeloved woman Blanche AParry…for our vse to be wore aboute our person one pece of fine Holland clothe for ruffs and partelets…107 ells of fine Holland clothe for diverse other necessaries for oure vse.” Although the warrant is about the delivery of linen to the queen, the small phrase “our welbeloved woman,” corroborates Parry’s claims on her epitaph of her close relationship to the queen who appreciated her loyal service.

Nor was Parry alone in recording her court career in her epitaph. Mary Radcliffe, who had started her court career as a maid of honor and later was promoted to a Gentlewoman of the privy chamber, dictated in her will that her executor “shall cause…to be made and set vp in or neere suche place where I shalbe buried a comelie and convenient Monument in Stone shewing bothe the [?] and birthe whereof I am descended and also the Roome and place where I lyved and served vnder her said late

33 As also discussed in Ch.2 Parry retained this position until 1587 when her failing eyesight forced her to pass on her duty and the jewels in her possession to Mary Radcliffe. An inventory of the jewels Parry turned over to Radcliffe, see BL, Royal MS Appendix 68.
34 TNA, LC 5/31 p.188. It is important to note that the phrase “our welbeloved woman” is a variation of the stock phrase “our well beloved servant,” a phrase usually reserved for men. Although this may have been a formulaic phrase, it was rarely used for women, and the special treatment Parry received at her death demonstrates there was validity to the phrase when it was applied to Parry in the warrants.
Maiestie.” Radcliffe, like Parry, never married, and it was to Radcliffe that Parry relinquished all of the royal jewels in her charge. In some cases, as with Mary Radcliffe, we know that the deceased commissioned his or her tombstone, but in other cases it is less clear if another relative decided the wording on the epitaph. The lack of definitive authorship, however, does not negate the significance of the permanent recognition of female court careers. Whether the wording was chosen by the woman herself or a by a relative, the subject matter, the woman’s court career, was considered important enough to the family history to be recorded and publicly displayed in the church or cathedral.

The woman’s royal service was a source of pride and a point of connection between a family and the country’s main source of power, prestige, and rewards—the monarch. Court service often defined the identity of the individual and either maintained or elevated their family’s elite social status.

Even women who only served a short term in the privy chamber often recorded their service on their tombs. Bridget Manners, the niece of Edward, Earl of Rutland, and daughter of John, earl of Rutland, served as a maid of honor. Nonetheless, on her tombstone erected by her husband, Mr. Robert Tyrrwhit, her royal service was recorded: “Sometime of the Privy Chamber to Queen Elizabeth.”

Lady Dorothy Stafford, a lady of the privy chamber who worked alongside Parry, has a monument on the northwest wall of St. Margaret’s chapel that also testifies to her lengthy court career, “She served

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35 TNA, Prob/11/132.
36 As discussed in the introduction, the creation of family histories was often a collaborative enterprise more concerned with recording the family achievements than with identifying the author doing the recording. For more information see Natalie Zemon Davis, “Ghosts, Kin and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France,” Daedalus 106 (1977), 87-114.
37 Violet Wilson, Queen Elizabeth’s Maids of Honor and Ladies of the Privy Chamber (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited), 197-198. According to Wilson, Lady Bridget’s tomb is located in Bigby Church in Lincolnshire.
When Catherine Carey, Lady Knollys died, her husband erected a tomb monument to his wife that not only recognized her high position at court, but his own court position identifying her as, "The Right Honorable Lady Katherin Knollys cheffe Lady of the Qvenes Maße Bedde Chamber and Wiffe to S’ Frañces Knollys Kĩght Treasorer of her Hignes Howsholde." (Figure 4.4) Like Parry, Lady Knollys was very close to the queen who also paid for her funeral. Another married courtier couple was Helena, Marchioness of Northampton and her second husband, Thomas Gorges, who also had their court service

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38 Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate the will of Dorothy Stafford to see what the will contains in regards to any charitable legacies. However, the tombs of both Blanche Parry and Dorothy Stafford are described and their epitaphs recorded in the manuscript work, Westminster Abbey Library, Dr John Physick, Abbey Monuments, 2 vols, (unpublished, 1991). Both of these tombs are briefly discussed and their epitaphs recorded in Elizabeth A. Brown, “‘Companion Me With My Mistress’: Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and Their Waiting Women,” in Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (eds.), Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 135-136. Brown 136 argues that these tombs testify that “Elizabeth’s waiting women thus functioned in a variety of ways that benefited both the queen and the complex networks of family and associates extending from them.” Brown, however, neither examines the tombs’ epitaphs closely nor does she analyze the tombs’ iconography.

39 I am quoting from a photograph of Catherine Knollys’ tomb which I purchased from the Westminster Abbey Library. Catherine Carey, Lady Knollys was the mother of Elizabeth, Lady Leighton and Lettice, Countess of Leicester, both of whom’s portraits were discussed earlier in the chapter. Lady Knollys’ tomb, has the Knollys’ family crest of the elephant on her tomb monument. See Fig. 4.2.

40 Elizabeth I paid for other aristocrats’ funerals: Elizabeth Cobham, Marchioness of Northampton (the second wife of the Marques of Northampton, William Parr, I will be discussing the tomb of his third wife) in 1565, the Countess of Lennox in 1577, and Lady Knolly’s brother, Lord Hunsdon in 1596, see Christopher Haigh, Elizabeth I (New York: Longman, 1988; 2nd edition 1998), 67.
carved on their epitaph. Whether single or married, women often had their court positions and royal service recorded on their tomb monuments.

Inscriptions on the tomb monuments identified these women as members of the most powerful place in the realm, the court. Parry and some of her fellow privy chamber servants also give examples of how they used their power. Parry’s epitaph continues by stating that she was “Beneficial to her kinsfolke and countrymen, charitable to the poore.” This line hints at the type of power court women could use and for what purposes. In Parry’s case, she was able to help some of her Catholic relatives. Her first cousin, Jane Lingen and her husband William Shelley were jailed and their property confiscated for recusancy, but Parry was able to look after them financially. She was also able to acquire crown offices for her Welsh kinsmen, including a place in the Queen’s Guards for one of her cousins, Rowland Vaughan. In addition to using her court position as a place to dispense patronage and financial benefits to her relatives, she also showed her charity to the poor. In her family lands in Herefordshire she donated enough money for one hundred and forty bushels of wheate and rye annually to the poor, whereas in London and “other places” she left money “for good uses.” According to a

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41 Both the Marchioness’ epitaph and that of her second husband, Sir Thomas Gorges are in Latin. An English translation can be found in Canon J. M. J. Fletcher, “The Gorges Monument in Salisbury Cathedral,” *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 46 (1932), 30-31. The first part of Helena’s epitaph reads, “Here were placed the remains of Hellen Snachenberg of Sweden, who attending the Lady Caecilia, daughter of Eric King of Sweden into this Kingdom on account of her beauty and modesty which were observed by Queen Elizabeth with pleasure appointed by her a Maid of Honor and one of her Ladies of the Bedchamber.” Sir Thomas Gorges’ epitaph also speaks to his court service under two monarchs, “the greater part of his life spent faithfully in the service of Queen Elizabeth and King James.”

42 Charlotte Merton, “The Women Who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553-1603,” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1992, 179; Bradford 16; Peters, XLII, 864. The main source for this information is a letter from J.A. Parry to Mrs. Jane Shelley written in 1593 that mentions “Mrs Blanche Parry procured your maintenance at 200l by ye year,” found in Hatfield House, UK, Cecil MSS 24/11r-v. Obviously this letter refers to something Blanche Parry had arranged before her death in 1590, but I have yet to discover when Parry made these arrangements.

43 Peters, XLII, 864.
codicil added to her will in December 1589, Parry had originally intended to build an almshouse, but she went on to say that if she did not have enough money to buy land for an almshouse that her executors should “purchase so muche Landes as shall yealde aboue all chardges yerelye for euer the number of Seauen skore bushels of Corne viz wheate and rye…distributed yerelye amongeste the poore people.” Thus, the act of charity recorded on Parry’s tomb stone was in actuality a contingency plan if her first idea could not be financially realized.

Other Elizabethan female courtiers also recorded their acts of charity for the poor on their tomb monuments and/or in their wills. For example, Lettice Knollys, the Countess of Leicester who had once been a maid of honor to Elizabeth, left one hundred pounds “To the poore in London.” The small plaque placed by Knollys’ tomb which she shares with her second husband, Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, but not placed on the tomb itself, also commemorated her life long charity to the poor, relayed that, “And the poore that lived neare/ Death nor famine could not feare.” Mary Radcliffe also put money aside for the poor in her will, “And I will that there shalbe bestowed by my Executor hereunder named amongst the poore people…the somme of twentie poundes to be distributed amongst them according to the discretion of my said Executor.” Anne Russell, the Countess of Warwick, who started her court career as a maid of honor to the queen, but remained an extraordinary lady of the privy chamber and a very close friend to the queen until the latter’s death in 1603, left money for an alms-

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44 TNA, Prob/11/75.
45 TNA, Prob/11/107. Knolly’s tomb will be discussed later in this chapter to analyze how her court career was a carefully edited by her descendents for their family’s history.
46 I would like to thank Peter Aldous who sent me an inscription of Lettice Knollys’ plaque and pictures of her tomb monument. In an e-mail dated 21 May 2006, Mr. Aldous also stated that Sir Gervase Clifton, her grandson from her first marriage to the Earl of Essex wrote the poem that was carved on a plaque and placed near her tomb monument.
47 TNA, Prob/11/132.
house to be built to house ten poor people, six women and four men.\footnote{48} Dorothy Stafford’s (Figure 4.5) epitaph speaks extensively about her beneficence towards the poor in both life and death, presenting her as “A continual remembrēcer of the sutes of the poor, as she lived a religious life…(As all her life) so after her death she gave liberally to ye poore….” Charitable acts were evidence of leading a virtuous and religious life.

Gifts to the poor were a common bequest made in wills in Post-Reformation England since it was a theologically acceptable way for a Protestant to dispose of his or her goods without falling into superstitious practices. English Protestants, for the most part, stopped giving money for church repairs, and it had become almost impossible through legislation to leave money for perpetual church masses to be said for one’s soul. By 1547 the chantries were made illegal and destroyed, and the money put aside for the upkeep of those chantries and for the saying of prayers for the dead was seized by the government.\footnote{49} Instead, royal injunctions and the Protestant clergy framed charity to the poor as a duty of a dying, but good Christian.\footnote{50} The juxtaposition of their secular and sacred activities on their tombstones indicates that

\footnote{48 Arthur Collins (ed.), \textit{Letters and Memorials of State}, I, 43. Her will in Latin is TNA, Prob/11/107.}
\footnote{49 Houlbrooke 116-117.}
\footnote{50 Houlbrooke 117; According to Houlbrooke the Books of Common prayer emphasized the need for people to take care of the poor in their wills.}
these women who had rooted themselves in the world of the court also wanted posterity
to see them as charitable, religious women. The combination of the earthly and the divine
aspirations of these women are written on a monument, that although in a sacred space,
the church, no longer primarily served a spiritual purpose. In this regard the tombs
functioned as social records testifying to how these individuals fashioned their public
memory, and revealing the criteria by which society judged individuals.

The last part of Parry’s London funerary epitaph declared that Parry had “died a
maide” at the age of eighty-two. Recognition of her single state was something Parry
clearly thought was important enough to be recorded both on this tomb monument, and
on the one she commissioned at St. Faith’s Church in Bacton, Herefordshire (Figure 4.6).
Like the tomb at St. Margaret’s, the Herefordshire tomb combines imagery and text both
of which declare Parry’s ties to the monarch and subtly hint at the ways she was able to
use her court position. The epitaph on the Herefordshire tomb is much longer than that of the London monument. It reads:

I, Parrye his doughter Blaenche of Newe Courte borne
That traenyd was in pryncys courts wyth gorgious wyghts,
Wheare fleetynge honor sounds wythe blaste of horne
Each accouhte too place of world’s delyghts
Am lodgyed here wythein thys stonye toombe
My harpynger ys paede I owghte of due
My frynds of speeche herein doo fynde me doombe
The whiche in vaene they doo so greatlye rhue
For so mooche as hyt ys but th’ende of all
Thys wordlye rowte of state what so they be
The whiche untoo the reste heerafter shall
Assemble thus each wyght in hys degree.
I lyvde allweys as handmaede too a queene
In chamber chiff my tyme dyd overpasse
Uncareful of my wealthe there was I seen
Whyllste I abode the ronnynge of my glasse.
Not doubtynge wante whylst that my mystress lyvde
In woman’s state whose cradell saw I rockte.
Her servaunte then as when shee her croune attcheev’d
And so remaend tyll deathe my doore had knockte.
Preferrynge stylle the causys of eache wyghte
As farre as I doorste move her grace hys eare
For to rewarde decerts by course of ryghte
As needs resytte of sarvys donne eache wheare
So that my tyme I thus dyd passe awaye
A maede in Courte and never no man’s wyffe
Sworne of quene Ellsbeth’s bedd chamber allwaye
Wythe maeden quene a maede dyd ende my lyffe.

The twenty-eight lined inscription is on a plaque positioned behind and above a figure of Blanche Parry who is carved kneeling before the figure of Queen Elizabeth. In one of Parry’s hands she holds a small orb, and in the other she holds a book. Rendered both in image and in words, Parry’s close connection to the queen is recorded for all those who can see, not just read.

Although the carved figures are rather extraordinary in terms of funerary sculpture, the first twelve lines deal with a topic commonplace for most tomb
monuments: speaking to the superficiality of an earthly life and how death will come to all regardless of how and where they lived their lives. Tomb monuments were part of the spectrum of devotional practices which often produced visual artifacts of the *memento mori* variety. The Reformed English Church supported the message that the *memento mori* images transmitted to viewers: to remind all of humanity of their mortality and to encourage people to lead lives of virtue since death could strike at any moment. Parry reminds her audience that despite having lived “in princes courts with gorgeous wyghts (people)” she is now “lodgyed here wythein thys stonye toombe,” and that death “hyt ys but th’ende of all.” Interestingly, although she reminds her viewer that death comes to everyone, typical of a *memento mori*, the inscription also upholds the earthly hierarchy in heaven, “Thys wordlye rowte of state what so they be/ The whiche unto the reste hereafter shall/ Assemble thus each wyght in hys degree.” At first glance it seems contradictory to state that all will die, but that in heaven people will be assembled according to their social station. However, this line speaks to the social purpose of the tomb which was to stabilize a community shaken by the universality of death. Therefore, Parry’s tomb, with its reminder that society was divided into a hierarchy, a hierarchy that was divinely sanctioned since it was to be reconstituted in heavenly eternity, is merely following the funerary conventions of her day.

What is not so conventional, at least to historians, is the public persona Parry fashioned for herself and for the queen she had so proudly served. Whereas Parry’s

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52 Llewellyn, *The Art of Death*, 9-12
London tomb had a rather conventional effigy of Parry kneeling in prayer, the Bacton sculpture is unique. Some scholars believe that the small orb in one hand is a pomander and that the other hand holds a book, and that both objects symbolize her duties as chief gentlewoman of the privy chamber to the queen.53 As already mentioned, Parry was in charge of the queen’s jewels, and in a 1587 inventory of the jewels in her charge being passed onto successor there is listed “Itm, one rounde pomaundre slightlie gar with sixe ribbes of golde and a little pearle at it.”54 Parry was also often put in charge of the books Elizabeth received as New Years Gifts. However, her connection to books extended beyond the court. In the 1584 publication of The Historie of Cambria, now called Wales, we learn that the author received an important book on the battle of Glamorgan from Parry, which enabled him to include this part of history in his larger work. In two different places he acknowledges his debt to Parry and in one section, describes her as “the right worshipfull Mistres Blanch Parry, one of the Gentlewomen of the Queenes Majesties priuie chamber, a singular well willer and furtherer of the weale publicke of that countrie.”55 Once again, the tomb allows Parry to demonstrate not only her sense of loyalty to the queen, but her participation in larger enterprises.

But even more intriguing than the items Parry’s Bacton effigy holds, is the depiction of her kneeling at the side of the queen. Nikolaus Pevsner has posited that this is a secular version of the medieval religious motif of a worshipper kneeling before the

53 Bradford 29. Llewellyn, Funeral Monuments, 317, identifies the item in Parry’s hand facing the viewer as a jewel box as opposed to a pomaundre. He argues the jewel box symbolizes the diamond ring Parry left to Elizabeth in her will. Either item of jewelry could act as a symbol of the responsibilities or the fruits of her court position.
54 BL, Royal MS Appendix 68, 1587 inventory of the queen’s jewels in Blanche Parry’s possession.
Virgin—and in this case not the Virgin Mary, but the Virgin Queen. By 1590, the date of Parry’s death, the Cult of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen was established, but only recently. What historians now know in hindsight—that Elizabeth would live and die a virgin—was not something her contemporaries knew until Elizabeth refused her last royal suitor, the Duke of Anjou, in 1582. Thus, the construction of Elizabeth’s image as the iconic Virgin queen had only been firmly established a few years before Parry’s death. Parry’s tomb helped establish the cult of the Virgin Queen in Herefordshire, miles away from London and the court, revealing that women too participated in the fashioning of Elizabeth’s monarchical image. Additionally, this image of the queen would remind its audience that Elizabeth was not only surrounded by men; instead, the statues in stone and alabaster declare that Elizabeth was actually most closely surrounded by women. Tombs

57 There is an extensive body of literature that examines the development of the cult of the Elizabeth, as coined by Sir Roy Strong. For a small survey of the literature that analyzed how Elizabeth I utilized portraiture and pageantry throughout her reign see, Frances A. Yates, Astraea, The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 29-87; Roy Strong, The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture (London: Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art in association with Routledge and K. Paul, 1969) and Strong’s The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy: Pageantry, Painting, and Iconography, 3 vols. (Rochester, New York: Boydell Press, 1995); Strong, Gloriana: the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I, (New York : Thames & Hudson, 1987) and Strong, The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Helen Hacket, Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (New York: St. Martin’s Press 1995); Carole Levin, “Power, Politics, and Sexuality: Images of Elizabeth I,” in Jean R. Brink, Alison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz (eds.), The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publications, 1989), 109-23. Constance Jordan has written on how gender and sex shaped Elizabeth’s needs to represent herself in “Representing Political Androgyny: More on the Siena Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I,” in Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (eds.), The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 157-176; Susan Frye’s, Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nannette Saloman, “Positioning Women in the Visual Convention: The Case of Elizabeth I,” in Betty S. Travitsky and Adele F. Seef (eds.), Attending to Women in Early Modern England (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 64-95. The work of John N.King, “Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen,” Renaissance Quarterly 43:1 (Spring 1990), 30-74, makes the important distinctions in Elizabeth’s portraiture before and after the Anjou courtship. Although Elizabeth was always presented as a virgin in the first half of her reign, it was as a chaste maiden on the marriage market. After the collapse of the Anjou marriage negotiations, it was clear Elizabeth would never marry—that was when Elizabeth as the iconic Virgin Queen was constructed through her portraiture and pageantry.
like Parry’s and those of other female privy chamberers provided another way in which courtiers could participate in fashioning the queen’s public persona. As demonstrated in chapter two, Parry and other courtiers of both sexes, participated in constructing the queen’s monarchical image while alive with gifts of jewels and clothes, and Parry did it too in her last earthly act—the building of her tomb monuments.

Parry, however, not only commemorated the fact that she was “a maede in Courte and never no man’s wyffe,” but compared her single, chaste state to that of Elizabeth’s with the inscription’s final line, “Wythe maeden quene a maede dyd ende my lyffe.” By choosing to memorialize Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen, Parry participated in the spread of the cult of Elizabeth outside of the royal palaces and London, an act which both bolstered Elizabeth’s chosen public image and constructed a positive and powerful image of Parry herself. The kneeling effigy and the plaque’s inscriptions invite its audience to see parallels between the servant and her mistress. Celebrating Elizabeth’s chastity and singleness enabled Parry to glorify her own personal state. The tomb’s suggested parallels between Blanche Parry and Queen Elizabeth demonstrates how the identities and images of the queen and her privy chamber women were intertwined. The tomb glorifies Elizabeth which in turn enhances the prestige of Parry who stakes her own importance on serving this monarch. This tomb is as much of a celebration of Parry’s status as it is an acknowledgement of the source of her status—the queen.

There is another dimension to the figures of the kneeling Parry and the front-facing queen. The conjunction of the epitaph and the effigy of Parry holding symbols of her office in her hands while paying homage to her royal mistress speaks to the role of patron that Parry exercised while at court. As Linda Levy Peck has demonstrated in her
examination of court patronage during the reigns of James I and Charles I, the Protestant English often used Catholic religious terminology that drew parallels between the relationship of a patron who, for his clients, brokered rewards from the monarch with the relationship of a saintly intercessor, such as the Virgin Mary, who helped human souls win divine benefits. Therefore, the tomb monument conflates the Virgin Mary with the Virgin Queen, to not only reproduce Elizabeth’s monarchical image, but to also present Parry as a broker of royal favor and rewards. Just as a saint would pray to God for a favor or a miracle, Parry, on her knees, beseeches Elizabeth for a royal blessing, not just for herself, but for her family, her friends, and her clients. This also speaks to the claim made in Parry’s tomb epitaph in Westminster, that she was “beneficial to her Kinsfolke and countrymen, charitable to the poore.” In both monuments Blanche Parry’s power and influence is not confined to the family, but extends to her fellow countrymen. Further evidence of Parry helping people other than her relatives is found in an undated letter from Parry to the “Mayor and his Breetheren of the Cittie of Herefford,” that thanks them for an unnamed gift she had received from them. After her line of gratitude for the gift she writes, “Iff I can or maye stand yowe in steede yowe shall fynde mee readie to pleasure yowe at all tymes.” Although we do not have both sides of the correspondence, this letter does record an exchange of a gift for a future good word if the town should need it. Parry’s relatives and their neighbors looked upon her as a potential intercessor between themselves and the queen. It is most fitting that Parry established a monument for herself as a patron in Hereford, a place she promised to help at any time.

Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 1993), 208-209. Peck’s work does not argue that there were any fundamental differences in how the system of patronage worked under Elizabeth and the early Stuart monarchs, just that there was a perception that the system was no longer working as it should under the Stuarts.

This short letter is quoted in full in Bradford 25-26.
Blanche Parry’s tomb inscription not only identifies her as a broker of royal patronage, but also carefully fashions exactly what type of patron she was while at court. Her Bacton epitaph claims that “Preferryng the cause of each wyghte/ As farre as I doorste move her grace hys eare/For to rewardes decerts by course of ryghte/ As needs resytte of sarvys donne eache wheare.” In these four lines she declares that she is able to move the queen to reward those individuals who have served the crown faithfully and honestly. Parry makes it clear that she only beseeched the queen to reward individuals who had merited such royal beneficence. Moreover, Parry also makes it clear that she did not abuse her power over the queen for self-gain. Instead Parry states that “In chamber chiff my tyme dyd overpasse/Uncareful of my wealthe there was I seen,” or in other words, she did not spend her time as Chief Gentlewoman of the privy chamber to gain power and wealth for herself. Instead Parry portrays herself as a royal servant only interested in serving her queen and her country by ensuring good service was duly rewarded. Parry was not alone in qualifying how she used her royal favor. The epitaph of Lady Bridget Tyrrwhit, née Manners, also states that she used her favor at court and her charm to help others and not herself, noting that she was “Sometime of the Privy chamber to Queen Elizabeth and in special grace and favor, Of speech affable, of countenance amiable, Nothing proud of her fortunes, and usynge her grace, Rather to benefit others than herselfe.” Parry, and at least one other former maid of honor, felt it necessary to justify the favor they carried with the queen and the ways they exercised power and received rewards as a result of that royal favor.

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60 My interpretation of these lines is, Preferring still the cause of each person/As far as I durst move her grace’s ear/to reward desserts by course of right/As needs receipts of service done each where.
61 Wilson 197.
Although Parry may have claimed that she was “uncareful of my wealthe,” throughout the course of her career, the queen rewarded Parry’s loyal service with wardships and leases of crown lands in Wales, Herefordshire, and Yorkshire. Upon Parry’s death, she was able to bequeath a rather impressive assortment of more than six diamonds, eight pieces of plate, some weighing as much as sixty ounces, one set of wall hangings, three carpets, approximately £2,000, nine pieces of jewelry that did not contain diamonds including “one chain of gold and a girdle which the Queen gave me,” twelve napkins, one towel, over six annual annuities from rents to various people, and some clothing. Although this legacy would be quite humble in comparison to many of Elizabeth’s male courtiers, it was an impressive collection of goods, jewels, cash and land for most people, let alone for a woman who never married. Moreover, although her landholdings could not compare financially to the commercial monopolies that many of her male courtiers obtained, Parry managed to die solvent and leave an impressive legacy instead of passing on large debts to her heirs. However, downplaying her acquired wealth enabled Parry to further fashion her identity as a court patron in a positive light.

The epitaph both expands upon and qualifies the tomb effigy’s claims to power. Parry obviously felt that it was necessary to make it clear to the tomb’s future viewers that she was a patron, but one who worked for the good of the queen and the commonwealth, not for herself. This language of contributing to the public good instead of busying oneself with private gain, is typical of the vocabulary surrounding the debates over corruption and service to the commonwealth. According to Linda Levy Peck, the discourse concerning service to the commonwealth drew on classical authorities,

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62 BL, Additional MS. 70038/104/1r-2r.
especially Cicero, alongside indigenous traditions.\textsuperscript{63} The small body of scholarship that has tackled the issue of corruption during Elizabeth’s reign has centered on the struggle over the queen’s granting of monopolies which came to a head in 1601.\textsuperscript{64} However, according to David Harris Sacks, the granting of monopolies had been a cause of complaint since the 1570s, and had even been condemned by one of Elizabeth’s leading privy councilors, Sir Francis Knollys.\textsuperscript{65} Nonetheless, by 1580 it had become commonplace to grant monopolies directly to courtiers.\textsuperscript{66} Many saw monopolies, where only a few individuals enjoyed vast amounts of the realm’s wealth, as hurtful to the greater good, the commonwealth, and by 1590 royal patents were a hotly disputed subject.\textsuperscript{67} Therefore, Parry’s tomb monument was commissioned during a time when the issue of royal patents and monopolies were already an acknowledged subject of debate, and consequently, the tomb may be trying to protect the deceased Parry from any potential blame for accepting money that rightfully belonged to the commonwealth.

Moreover, Parry’s epitaph not only exonerates her from any personal wrong-doing, but rather argues that she fulfilled her obligation to the commonwealth by ensuring that Elizabeth did not fall into error when the queen decided to bestow rewards onto people. Although it would be eleven years later when Elizabeth made her 1601 “Golden Speech” to Parliament, that speech admitted that granting monopolies was a mistake and

\textsuperscript{65} Sacks “The countervailing benefits,” 274.
\textsuperscript{66} Sacks, “Private Profit,” 124.
\textsuperscript{67} Sacks, “Private Profit,” 121-33; Sacks, “The countervailing benefits,” 274.
applauded the critics of the policy from keeping her from lapsing into further error. As Elizabeth said to the speaker of the House of Commons, “Mr. Speaker, you give me thanks, but I doubt me that I have more cause to thank you all than you me…For had I not received a knowledge from you, I might have fallen into lapse of an error only for lack of true information.” These lines declare Elizabeth’s dependence upon her subjects for true information so that she can make the right decision. Therefore, Parry’s epitaph claims that she “Preferrynge styll the causys of eache wyghte/As farre as I doorste move her grace hys eare/For to rewarde decerts by course of ryghte/ As needs resytte of sarvys donne eache warre,” helped Elizabeth in her queenly duties to only reward those who deserved to be rewarded.

Parry’s epitaph also establishes why Elizabeth could trust her advice. Parry makes it clear that her entire life revolved around serving the queen, “I lyvde allweys as handmaede too a queene…Not doubtynge wante whilst that my mistress lyvde/In woman’s state whose cradell saw I rocket/Her servante then as when shee her croune attcheev’d/ And so remaend tyll deathe my doore had knockte.” The inscription not only states that Parry served the queen from Elizabeth’s birth until Parry’s death, but that Elizabeth always took care of her faithful servant. Since Parry was “not doubtyng want” while Elizabeth lived, she had no reason to lie to Elizabeth to gain wealth for herself.

Parry’s claim that she was “uncareful of my wealthe” at court acts as evidence supporting the claim that all of Parry’s needs were taken care of under Elizabeth. Parry’s testimony

68 Elizabeth I, “Elizabeth’s Golden Speech, November 30, 1601, Version 1 the Common’s journal of Hayward Townshend, MP for Bishopscastle, Shropshire, from Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Rawlinson A 100, fols. 97v-101r,” reproduced in Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (eds.), Elizabeth I Collected Works, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 338. David Harris Sacks has analyzed this speech and what it reveals about Tudor political theory and practice in regards to corruption can be found in Sacks, “Private Profit,” 133-140, and Sacks, “The countervailing benefits,” 277-282, 281, deals with the idea that English subjects had a duty to help the queen correct any errors she may have made.
of faithful service and disinterest in wealth acts as a shield against any claims that she acted against the good of the commonwealth. Such careful crafting of her tomb’s inscription reveals that Parry was aware of the discourse surrounding monopolies and what it meant to serve the commonwealth.

The tomb at St. Margaret’s in London and the one constructed at St. Faith’s in Herefordshire act as historical documents that testify both to who Blanche Parry believed herself to be, and to whom Parry wanted Elizabeth to be—the icon, the forever Virgin Queen. From these tombs we see how court women and their families wanted to preserve the role these women played at court while simultaneously constructing what that role constituted. Parry’s self-fashioning, however, depended upon how the queen was perceived; Parry’s history was completely dependent upon Elizabeth’s, yet the history of Elizabeth’s reign was also partially dependent upon how her female servants would be remembered. Blanche Parry was able to glorify her own life as a singlewoman by glorifying Elizabeth’s single, chaste state. However, it was not merely as a virgin that Parry wanted herself or her queen to be remembered. The one-time chief gentlewoman of Elizabeth’s privy chamber also fashioned herself as a virgin intercessor to a Virgin Queen, not on matters that concerned the soul, but rather on matters that concerned the body—the body politic.

**Family Matters**

Blanche Parry’s tomb monuments are not the only ones that can be read as histories and as histories written in body language. Indeed, women’s bodies, both their living bodies and their stone, monumental bodies were central in shaping histories of
Elizabeth I. Unlike Blanche Parry, some women or their families chose not to glorify Elizabeth. Some of the tomb monuments of Elizabeth’s female courtiers are spaces where the women or their families either try to disconnect themselves from Elizabeth or to offer heavily revised histories of their relationship to the queen. Deciding whether to embrace or reject a woman’s royal service shaped how an individual’s identity would be constructed and how the family history would be told. Moreover, family histories that edit their connection to the queen and their role in England’s politics often create an alternative history of Elizabeth’s reign, demonstrating once more how the image and power of the queen was intertwined with the image and power of her serving women.

This chapter began with the analysis of the tomb of Lady Jane Seymour, but the tomb of her brother, Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, also deserves close examination. Far in the back of Salisbury Cathedral in the east end of the south choir aisle, stands an enormous family tomb. (Figure 4.7) This skyscraper-like monument revolves around four marble figures. The two marble effigies commemorate Edward Seymour, Earl of
Hertford and a woman, whom the huge marble plaque declares is Catherine Grey, his wife. These peacefully and eternally resting spouses are flanked by two kneeling figures, their adult sons, Edward Seymour, Lord Beauchamp (figure on the left) and his younger brother Thomas Seymour (on the right). This grand scene of family devotion suffers from one minor flaw: this family never legally existed.

Many who read histories of Elizabeth I’s reign will encounter the tragic love story of the courtiers Catherine Grey and Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford. In 1560, Grey, a maid of honor to Elizabeth I and a great-granddaughter of King Henry VII, making her a potential heir to the throne, secretly married Edward Seymour, another claimant to the crown.69 Within less than a year, the earl had been sent abroad, the one witness to the marriage, Lady Jane Seymour, Grey’s fellow maid of honor to Elizabeth I and the Earl’s sister, was dead, and Catherine Grey was pregnant. When Grey could no longer conceal her pregnancy, she was forced to reveal to Elizabeth I her secret marriage, and the queen responded by imprisoning Grey in the Tower and recalling her husband from Europe so that he might join his wife there, though in separate rooms. Despite their official separation in the Tower, sympathetic guards allowed Grey and Seymour to welcome their first son into the world and to produce another.70 Now Grey’s claim to the throne was bolstered by the production of a male heir and a spare. To secure her shaky throne,

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69 Seymour’s claim to the throne rested on the fact that his aunt was Queen Jane Seymour, thus making him a first cousin to Edward VI (The chapter began with the analysis of his sister’s funeral and tomb monument). Moreover, courtiers were supposed to get the Queen’s permission to marry, but under Henry VIII a law had been passed that required individuals with a potential claim to the throne to get permission from the Privy Council to marry. Technically, Grey and Hertford committed treason by secretly getting married, see Canon Fletcher, The Hertford Monument in Salisbury Cathedral: A Lecture (George Simpson & Co, Devizes, 1927), unpaginated.

70 Elizabeth drafted letters patent calling for an investigation into the validity of the marriage, see SP 12/21/76-77. Norman Jones in his chapter on marriage in The Birth of the Elizabethan Age (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 102-106, discusses the Hertford marriage and the resulting ecclesiastical trial. Henry Machyn also noted in his diary the birth of both of Grey’s sons, Machyn 267-8; 300.
Elizabeth I moved against the Grey-Seymour alliance by calling for an investigation into the validity of the marriage. By February 1563, the Ecclesiastical High Commission declared the union illegal.\(^71\) Grey was deprived of a husband, and her children of any legitimate status; bastards did not threaten Elizabeth’s right to rule.\(^72\)

In hindsight, it seems that the marriage of Catherine Grey and Edward Seymour, was not politically motivated, but a true love match.\(^73\) For Elizabeth, the couple’s motivations were meaningless since Grey was occasionally the subject of plots to replace Elizabeth on the throne. There had been rumors of a Spanish plot to kidnap Grey and set her up on the throne; the fact that Grey had a male heir, increased the plausibility of these rumors.\(^74\) Elizabeth also grew concerned over a pamphlet published in 1564 by John Hales, a member of Parliament and Clerk of the Hanaper. In his pamphlet, Hales challenged the Ecclesiastical Commission’s decision and argued that Grey’s sons were the legitimate heirs to the throne, as opposed to any heirs begotten by Elizabeth’s other cousin, the Catholic Mary Stuart, Queen of the Scots.\(^75\) Hale argued that Catherine Grey

\(^71\) CSPD Addendum, 535; The proceedings of the ecclesiastical commission can be followed in Bodelian Library, Oxford University, Tanner MS 84, fos.105-97.

\(^72\) Eventually under James, the children were able to inherit their father’s lands and titles, but James upheld the bastardy judgement, see Susan Doran, “Seymour, Edward, first earl of Hertford,” \textit{ODNB}, XLVIII, 870. The amateur, unpublished family history of the Seymour family, \textit{Annals of the Seymours}, Folger Manuscript W.b.262 fo.177 recto claims that the children’s legitimacy was restored, but it contains many other factual errors. However, the mistake in claiming the children were made legally legitimate is understandable since a grandson of Catherine Grey and Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford was able to inherit both his grandfather’s title and lands which the bastards of noblemen were usually prohibited from doing.

\(^73\) Jones 103.


\(^75\) Jones 106 states that a pamphlet was published in 1564, but I can find no extant copies. There is an eighteenth-century publication at the British Library, but Levine, (1966), 233 in his bibliography cites manuscript sources, BL, Harlean MS 4666, fols. 1-19; BL, Sloane MS 827, fols. 1-17; Cambridge MS Gg. Iii 34, 144-73; Rawlinson MS B7, fols. 1-14 and only one printed version in Francis Hargrave, \textit{The Hereditary Right of the Crown of England Asserted} (London, 1713), xx-xlili. Susan Doran, “Katherine [née Grey] Seymour, countess of Hertford,” \textit{ODNB}, XLVIII, 890 only mentions that Hales wrote a manuscript tract. The 1563 manuscript version of Hale’s pamphlet, Folger, X.d.19, entitled, “A Declaratyon of the Successyon of the Crowne Imperyall of England,” argued that the Scottish branch of the Tudor royal family
was the rightful heir if Elizabeth died without issue, “This heue I deckaryd vnto you my
judgement touchinge the right hends…To the Crowne of England in remayn
ds…which is
as I take yt presently the Lady Katheryne Daughter to the Lady ffraunces both by kinge
henry his will and also by the common Lawes of this Realme and that we be bound both
by.”

Whatever Grey’s and Seymour’s actual reasons were to marry, the reality of their
strong joint claim to the throne was too great for Elizabeth to ignore. Once the children of
the marriage were barred from inheriting their parents’ titles, and thus their claim to the
throne, Elizabeth must have felt more secure.

Eventually Grey and Seymour were released from the Tower in 1563, but they
were kept under house arrest in different locations. Furthermore, Grey was deprived of
the custody of her eldest son who had been given to his father. Grey and her youngest
son lived under house arrest away from Court until her early death in 1568. When Grey
died, Elizabeth assumed responsibility for Grey’s funeral in a warrant dated “the thirde
Day of ffbruary” which ordered Sir Owen Hopton “to take the care of the entrerement
and buriall of o[u]f lat cosin the Lady Katheryn Deceassed Doughter of o[ ]’ entirely
beloved cosin the lat Duchesse of Suffolk…Our will and pleasure is that youe shall
Delyver…suche nombre and sorts of blacke cloths and other things at such price to be
used at the said burial.”

Although Grey had posed a potential threat to Elizabeth’s
throne, that threat stemmed from the fact Grey was a member of the royal family.
Elizabeth had to walk the delicate line between containing threats to her crown, while

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76 Folger, X.d.19 f.17r.
77 TNA, LC 5/34 p.33. The language of the warrant is interesting. Elizabeth describes Catherine’s
mother as “entirely beloved,” but does not do so for Catherine herself. However, Elizabeth did ensure that
a member of the royal family was buried by the crown.
still upholding the prestige and privileges of the royal family.\textsuperscript{78} Grey was buried in Yoxford Church, Suffolk, until her remains were later removed to join the Earl at his resting place at Salisbury.\textsuperscript{79} Seymour was released shortly after Grey’s death, and eventually he and Elizabeth I reconciled. The earl married twice more and outlived his two sons, finally dying in 1621 in his early 80s. Usually the story of these star-crossed lovers traditionally ends with Elizabeth triumphant over the heart-broken Catherine.\textsuperscript{80} However, that is not the end of the story; Elizabeth’s victory over Catherine Grey and her family was a temporal one only. In the back of Salisbury Cathedral, Catherine Grey rests in stone cold triumph over Elizabeth I as she and the family she struggled to create stand eternally together for all to see.

\textsuperscript{78} Catherine Grey would prove but a small skirmish in comparison with another royal cousin, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Once more Elizabeth would struggle with the difficulties in treating members of the royal family with the respect due their esteemed social position even when they used that position to threaten Elizabeth’s throne.

\textsuperscript{79} Fletcher, \textit{The Hertford Monument}.

\textsuperscript{80} For a traditional telling of the Grey-Seymour drama please see Violet Wilson, \textit{Queen Elizabeth’s Maid of Honour and Ladies of the Privy Chamber} (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1923), 69 footnote 2 where Wilson states “Lady Catherine died of decline whilst in the custody of Sir Owen Hopton at Yoxford in Suffolk. She and her husband never met again after they parted in the Tower.” Norman Jones 87-118, discusses the Grey-Seymour marriage, its trial and its subsequent annulment, but does not mention the tomb in Salisbury Cathedral. David Starkey in \textit{Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne} (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc, 2001), 319, barely mentions the failed Grey-Seymour marriage: “Elizabeth also used the amorous adventures of the surviving Grey sisters…to put them under lock and key as well.”
The Seymours were not the only court family to offer revised histories. Salisbury Cathedral also houses another large, early-seventeenth-century funerary monument. This is the tomb of Helena, Marchioness of Northampton and her second husband, Thomas Gorges.\(^{81}\) (Figure 4.8) Analyzing the Grey-Seymour tomb and the Gorges tomb together highlights the different strategies employed by families to deliberately draft their history. On the sides of the Gorges tomb under their respective effigies, each spouse lists their ancestry and their accomplishments. For example, on Helena’s side the Latin epitaph states, “Here were placed the remains of Hellen Schnachenberg of Sweden, who attending the Lady Caecilia, daughter of Eric King of Sweden into this Kingdom on account of her beauty and modesty which were observed by Queen Elizabeth with pleasure and appointed by her a Maid of Honour and one of her Ladies of the Bedchamber.”\(^{82}\) Thomas Gorges’ side tells readers that he was a “Knight, 5\(^{th}\) son of Sir

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\(^{82}\) All subsequent translations of the monument inscriptions were provided by Suzanne Eaward, Librarian and Keeper of the Muniments of Salisbury Cathedral. Eward sent me copies of printed pages that have descriptions of the tombs and translations of the inscriptions, but she did not provide me with the title from which these copies were made.

Helena of Schnachenberg’s entire epitaph reads: “Hic sita sunt ossa Hellene Schnachenberg/Swedanae quae Dominam Caeciliam filiam/ Erici Regis Swetiae in hoc regnum
Edward Gorges of Wraxall...Knight,” who spent most of his life “in the service of Queen Elizabeth and King James, both of Blessed memory.” Each spouse listed their royal service as an important aspect of their lives that they wanted preserved for others to read, making their epitaphs sites where personal histories intersect with larger national histories. It is their very connection to the court that makes these individuals and their families important and powerful. Their tomb, commissioned and paid for by their eldest son in 1635, is both evidence of and a record to that power and prestige.\(^8\)

The Gorges, like Catherine Grey and the Earl of Hertfordfell out of favor with the queen, when they married secretly without asking the queen’s permission; however, their experiences differed dramatically. Moreover, Helena’s monumental history counters an overly simplistic reading of a vindictive Virgin Queen who tried to keep all her courtiers from enjoying the state of marital bliss that she denied herself. Helena’s epitaph continues with the statement that she was “bestowed in marriage on William Lord Parr of Kendal, Marquess of Northampton.” Queen Elizabeth made it very clear that she approved of the 1571 marriage between Helena and the brother of her final stepmother, Catherine Parr, because she was present at their wedding which took place in the Queen’s Royal Chapel.\(^8\) The reasons why Elizabeth reacted badly to Helena’s second marriage

\(^8\) Fletcher, The Gorges Monument, 161; Susan Brown, Sumptuous and Richly Adorn’d: The Decoration of Salisbury Cathedral (London: The Stationery Office, 1999), 146.

\(^8\) Record of the Marques and Marchioness’ marriage taking place in the Royal Chapel, see The Old Cheque-Book or Book of Remembrance of the Chapel Royal from 1561 to 1744, ed. Edward F. Rimbault,
were two fold: they had married without Elizabeth’s consent, and Helena had married a man beneath her social station. As the epitaphs make clear, Helena was a Swedish noblewoman who had first married a highly positioned English nobleman, whereas Thomas Gorges, was but a gentleman, a knight. Not surprisingly, the rest of Helena’s inscription makes no allusion to the fact that Gorges ended up serving a brief amount of time in the Tower as a result of their marriage. Instead, Helena’s epitaph constructs a smooth transition from her widowhood to her remarriage; she was “bestowed in marriage to William Lord Parr…who dying without issue she married Sir Thomas Gorges, to whom she bore four sons and three daughters, after whose death she lived 25 years a widow piously.” Ultimately, Helena and her husband’s period of royal disfavor was short, because their crime was far less serious than that of Grey and Seymour who had not only married without the queen’s consent, but had created a union that could have potential consequences concerning the succession to the English throne. Eventually, Helena and Thomas regained Elizabeth’s favor and were able to remain married and establish a family. Whereas Catherine Grey died in disgrace and disfavor, Helena acted as Elizabeth I’s chief mourner at her funeral, and Thomas Gorges was able to continue his service to the crown under James I.

Both tombs either minimize or ignore the royal wrath that each of the couples incurred for marrying without Elizabeth’s permission. The plaque on the Grey-Seymour monument states that “repeatedly they experienced the vicissitudes of fortune. Here at length they rest together in the same harmony with which they lived.” Spending close to

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[Printed for the Camden Society] (London: J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1872), 160 and Bradford 57-58. The marriage was very short, as William Parr died six months later in 1571.

Bradford 63.

TNA, LC 2/4/4, the account book of Elizabeth I’s funeral.
eight years under arrest, having their marriage judged to be invalid and their children illegitimate are minimized with the bland platitude, “the vicissitudes of fortune” and contradict the inscription’s claim that they lived together in harmony—especially since they never even lived together except for the time the earl was able to steal into Grey’s rooms in the Tower! 87 Indeed, it was only in death that Catherine Grey was able to recover her title of wife and Countess of Hertford. The Gorges tomb also edits their period of royal disfavor when they married without Elizabeth I’s consent in 1576. 88 Although it is clear why families would excise moments of disgrace, the absence of these dishonorable episodes testify to the family’s ability to deliberately select what the family history would contain. Tomb monuments should be viewed as historical records that often constructed alternative histories concerning the memorialized individuals, their families, and sometimes even national historical narratives.

The Gorges tomb and the Grey-Seymour tombs form interesting family histories because they demonstrate two important ways a family could edit and create such a history: through their choice of words and their use of women’s monumental bodies. The editing work on both tombs is clear: there is no mention of any period of royal disfavor and punishment. Both tombs also employ body language, or placement of the effigies, to construct a particular family history, but each family uses this tool differently. The body language of the Gorges’ tomb erases their crime of a social status mismatch. (Figure 4.9)

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87 Hester W. Chapman, Two Portraits: Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and Lady Katherine Grey (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), 151-161, discusses the disconnect between the tomb’s presentation of their life and character with what was recorded in other historical sources.

88 Bradford 65-67, does not give the exact year they married but declares that in 1576 Helena was in disfavor and Gorges was imprisoned for their clandestine marriage. Paul Harrington, “Gorges [née Snackenborg] Helena, Lady Gorges,” ODNB, XXII, 994, states that they were married “about 1576.”
Figure 4.9. Detail of the effigies of Helena, Marchioness of Northampton on the left and her second husband, Sir Thomas Gorges, on the right, Salisbury Cathedral, Salisbury, UK.

The two effigies of husband and wife are laid side by side, resting as equals, even though Helena’s social status was technically the higher. The deliberate placement of the monumental bodies is not meant to erase Helena’s status or degrade it in any way, but to raise her husband’s. Even though they lay side by side, Helena’s effigy is given sartorial markers to allude to her rank as Marchioness. Her effigy’s carved outfit includes a mantle lined with ermine and the sleeves of her dress have ermine cuffs, (Figure 4.10) which invokes the outfit she wore at the coronation of Elizabeth I’s successor, James I, as
recorded in portraiture. Gorges’s effigy, by contrast, wears his knightly armor, but no ermine, which was reserved for the nobility, not the gentry. Therefore, a social balance is created between spouses, but not at the expense of Helena, Marchioness of Northampton’s rank and accomplishments. Helena is not marginalized in this history, but rather her high standing and accomplishments are yoked to her husband, so that their children would inherit a joint patrimony of past royal service and noble blood.

I found this image and a copy of it in the Heinz Library, the picture archive of London’s National Portrait Gallery. One portrait was at Shadwell Park, Thetford, Norfolk until it was sold at Sotheby’s in the 1990s; the other portrait is currently located at Rousham House, which houses part of the Ashton collection. More than likely it was painted in the style of Robert Peake shortly after James I’s coronation as the Marchioness is dressed in the red velvet associated with coronation dress. There are other portraits of both men and women dressed in all, or part of, their coronation finery, such as Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford whose coronation portrait was also painted by a follower of Robert Peake c.1603 and is currently held by the London National Portrait Gallery, see Janet Arnold, Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe Unlocke’d (Leeds, UK: W.S. Maney & Sons, 1988), 64-65.
Figure 4.11. Detail of the effigies of Catherine Grey and Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, Salisbury Cathedral, Salisbury, UK.

Whereas the monumental body and past of Helena, Marchioness of Northampton, were placed side by side with her husband’s, Catherine Grey’s effigy and ancestry are at the forefront of her funerary monument. In spite of the fact that the monument including her is known officially as the Hertford Monument, the entire structure revolves around her effigy. (Figure 4.11) She is placed above the effigy of the earl, not by his side as on the Gorges monument. The most obvious explanation of this was that her lineage was superior to that of the earl’s.90 Their lineages are carved out in Latin in the large plaque above Grey and Seymour. The earl was

Son and heir of the most illustrious, most noble Edward Duke of Somerset, Earl of Hertford, and Viscount Beauchamp and Baron St. Maur, K[night of the].G [arter]. Uncle and Guardian of King Edward VI and Lord Protector of the

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90 Fletcher, *The Hertford Monument*. 
Kingdom, Commander in Chief . . . Treasurer and Earl Marshall of England and Governor of Guernsey and Jersey by Ann his wife descended from an ancient and noble family.  

Edward Seymour’s epitaph, just like his sister’s, frames him in an impressive aristocratic lineage that includes kings for cousins.

As esteemed as this lineage may be, it does not quite equal the family ancestry of “his dearly beloved wife Catherine [Grey], daughter and heiress of Henry and Frances Grey, Duke and Duchess of Suffolk, [the latter who was] daughter of Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk and Mary his wife, sister of Henry VIII and Dowager Queen of France and endowed as her granddaughter and the great-granddaughter of Henry VII.”

Whereas Seymour’s claim to greatness was that his father held high positions of power, the closest he comes to royalty is that he is the cousin of a king. Grey, on the other hand, is the great-granddaughter of a king, and granddaughter of a queen. Her lineage is of greater genealogical value, which elevates her physically on the tomb. The Hertford monument illustrates a different strategy from the one demonstrated by the Gorges tomb.

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92 The translation of the Latin inscriptions comes from Fletcher, The Hertford Monument, which also contains the details of the Grey-Hertford Story and tomb also come from this lecture.

Fletcher, The Hertford Monument.
Instead of trying to equalize the spouses, Catherine Grey’s royal blood is highlighted and stands apart from the body and blood of her husband. This royal princess’ blood augmented the Seymour family claim to royalty that the Earl’s own lineage could not as effectively provide. Moreover, this royal blood, although stemming from King Henry VII, had been transmitted exclusively by women: his daughter Mary passed it onto her daughter Frances, who in turn gave it to her daughters, one of whom was Catherine Grey.94

Not only was the body language deliberately crafted, so too was the inscription. The omissions on the inscription, as in the Gorges’ Monument, are just as interesting as what was presented. Nowhere on the tomb are the names of the two other wives of the Earl of Hertford. The earl had provided his first legally recognized wife, Frances Howard, daughter of Lord Howard of Effingham, with a monument at Westminster Abbey—but his last wife, another Frances Howard who outlived him, is not mentioned anywhere on the monument.95 As demonstrated by the Gorges Monument, including references to other spouses was quite common. Indeed, husbands who married more than once were sometimes buried with both wives. However, the bodies of the Earl of Hertford’s subsequent wives were edited out of this family history. Another woman

94 An even more famous daughter, was Jane, who was Queen for nine days, before Mary I took the throne back. Eventually Mary ordered the execution of Grey, her husband, and Grey’s father-in-law the Duke of Northumberland who had engineered Grey’s accession.

95 As his second wife he married the Frances, widowed daughter of Thomas, Viscount Howard of Bindon, who married as her third husband, Ludovick Stuart, second duke of Lennox and duke of Richmond. Her will and tomb monument also show a disconnect between public performance and private reality. In her will she requested to be buried in the sheets from her wedding night and to be interred with her husband whose monument in the Henry VII chapel in Westminster Abbey also had her effigy. Their actual marriage had been a complete failure. However, the tomb monument with its joint Howard-Stuart heraldry would only testify to eternally, peaceful spouses. For further details see Llewellyn, Funeral Monuments, 289-291. Not all tombs had to be edited to show conjugal bliss; many couples chose to be buried separately such as Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury and George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury. The estranged couple were buried in two completely different locations and the earl’s tomb makes no mention of Elizabeth at all, see Llewellyn, Funeral Monuments, 293.
erased from this text is Queen Elizabeth I. Grey’s position as maid of honor to Elizabeth I is not stated, and Seymour’s service to James I as an ambassador is only mentioned in passing in a paragraph after the one in which Catherine Grey’s life is recounted. As we saw with the Gorges monument, tomb texts often modified the histories of those commemorated by the tomb, making it very easy to list the family’s honors and leave out any dishonor. And yet here the honor of Grey’s royal service was not mentioned and that of her husband was marginalized. Instead both Seymour and Grey, and consequently their descendants, stand apart from and independent of Elizabeth I and James I.

It is understandable why Elizabeth I would be banished from this space, but to understand why James I received similar (though not as harsh) treatment we must discuss the authorship of this tomb. William Seymour, the earl’s grandson, commissioned the tomb shortly after the death of his grandfather. Seymour inherited both his grandfather’s title of Earl of Hertford and the first earl’s penchant for secretly marrying heirs to the English crown. In 1610 he married Arbella Stuart, first cousin to King James I. Like his grandparents, William and Arbella too were arrested, separated and imprisoned. A failed escape attempt left Arbella Stuart to die of grief and starvation while under house arrest and left William Seymour free, but in exile on the Continent. When Arbella Stuart died in 1615, Seymour made peace with the king and returned to court where he earned a knighthood and continued in royal service. Six years later his grandfather died and William Seymour commissioned his tomb. Although Seymour had returned to the court

\[\text{\[96\] Another omission of Catherine Grey’s life was her divorce from a husband she had been betrothed to as a young child, see Fletcher, The Hertford Monument and Wilson 107.}
\[\text{\[97\] Ruth Norrington, In the Shadow of the Throne: The Lady Arbella Stuart (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2002), 106 discusses the secret wedding; 119-133 the plan to escape; 135-142 her further imprisonment; 147 her refusal to eat and date of her death 25 September 1615.}
\[\text{\[98\] Fletcher, The Hertford Monument.}\]
of James I, the wounds of his failed attempt to gain power by marrying a royal heir must not have completely healed, since he rehabilitated his family at the expense of the two sources that had forcefully stopped the family’s further ascent up the social and political ladder. By leaving out the names of Elizabeth I and by barely acknowledging James I, the Seymour family connections to those monarchs were minimized, allowing the Seymour’s claims to royalty to stand on their own.

Although William Seymour appropriated the body and memory of his grandmother for his own purposes, he was not going against how Grey had portrayed herself throughout her imprisonment: as a mother, and therefore, as a wife. Shortly after the birth of her first son, Catherine Grey had at least one portrait painted of her holding her infant son, Edward Lord Beauchamp. Portraits were often commissioned to commemorate important accomplishments achieved by an individual or a family, and women were sometimes painted pregnant or with their children, testifying that they were both a wife and that they were dutifully fulfilling their duty as wife—to bear legitimate children. By recording herself as a mother, Grey is also declaring that she is the wife of the child’s father, and therefore, stating she is the Countess of Hereford. This double portrait of mother and son testifies to Grey’s decision to celebrate the arrival of her son, by an unknown artist, Grey also wears a circular miniature of her husband that hangs on a

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ribbon around her neck, reinforcing her declaration that she is a married woman.\textsuperscript{101} The child’s father, Edward Seymour, the Earl of Hertford never repudiated the marriage, even after the ecclesiastical court had declared the marriage invalid. Seymour also petitioned for the sentence to be repealed in 1595 which once more landed him in the Tower for a short period, and in 1608, during the reign of James I, began legal proceedings to have Edward, Lord Beauchamp (a courtesy title) recognized as legitimate. James allowed the title, Earl of Hertford, to be inherited by Edward, but the king refused to null the bastardy judgement.\textsuperscript{102} Catherine Grey’s portrait and the Seymour tomb at Salisbury Cathedral work together to create a family that never legally existed in the eyes of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ecclesiastical courts. The portraits and the tomb challenge the accepted historical version of this story. Therefore, although Grey did not commission her final tomb, it does present Grey in the way she perceived herself: as the lawful wife of Edward Seymour, the Earl of Hertford.

Although Catherine Grey had to wait over fifty years to be reunited with her husband, other wives were able to choose for themselves where they would be buried and with whom. As with the example of Helena, Marchioness of Northampton, women who

\textsuperscript{101} One of the portraits of Catherine Grey was included in exhibition catalogue Elizabeth: The Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum, ed. Susan Doran (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003), 64. The illustration credits on page 278 only mention that it is in the collection of the Duke of Rutland. According to Doran, “Katherine [née Grey] Seymour,” XLVIII, 890, mentions only one double portrait of Grey and her son and attributes it to Hans Eworth now at Petworth House, Sussex. I am not sure if that is the image reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, however, the image reproduced in the exhibition catalogue is a late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century copy of an original at Petworth House. I am thankful for the help of Jane Cunningham, Head of the Photo Survey at the Courtauld Institute of London, who pointed out to me that there are at least three double portraits of Grey and Lord Beauchamp, but two of them were painted after Grey’s death. Another sixteenth-century image of Grey and her son is a miniature attributed to Levina Teerlinc (the miniature has the artist’s telltale ultra thin arms) that is very similar to the larger portraits except for a few details such as the pattern on the material of her sleeves and the miniature jewel of the Earl of Hertford and part of the Duke of Rutland’s collection at Belvoir Castle is discussed in The English Miniature, eds. John Murdoch, Jim Murrell, Patrick J. Noon, and Roy Strong (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 76.

\textsuperscript{102} Doran, “Seymour, Edward, first earl of Hertford,” XIVIII, 870.
had been married more than once, had multiple ways they could commemorate their past spouses. The Marchioness only had her aristocratic title because of her first marriage, and so by including that marriage in her epitaph she is able to record her privileged status. As already discussed, the Gorges tomb monument employs various strategies so that the first marriage in no way belittles the second husband who rests by Helena’s side. Another woman who had a complicated family history to tell was Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester. By the time of her death on Christmas Day in 1634 she had already outlived three husbands and a son. Her will dictated that she was “to bee layd at Warwicke by my deere Lord and husband the Earle of Lecester with whom I desire to bee intombed.”

Her choice to be buried with her second husband, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester constructed a highly edited autobiography.

In order to fulfill the Countess of Leicester’s last wishes, changes had to be made to the Earl of Leicester’s tomb. (Figure 4.12) Although it is not clear when the Earl of Leicester’s tomb was constructed, it must have not been originally intended to display an effigy of the countess since his effigy had to be shifted over to make room for hers.

The bright and colorful tomb monument places Leicester’s effigy to the front, closer to the viewer, whereas the countess’ effigy is in the back, although raised slightly higher than that of her husband. Unlike the Seymour-Grey and the Gorges monuments, I do not believe the placement of the wife’s effigy was a deliberate attempt to be seen as socially superior to her husband; more likely it was the result of trying to fit her effigy on the tomb. The earl’s effigy is dressed in armor which is embellished with gold accents. His

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103 TNA, Prob 11/167
104 Simon Adams, “Dudley, [née Knollys; other married name Devereux], Lettice,” ODNB, XVII, 90, I have not yet determined when Dudley’s tomb was constructed, and therefore do not know how much time elapsed between its original construction and when it was altered to accommodate the countess’ effigy.
Figure 4.12. Unknown Artist, Funerary Monument of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester, erected between 1602 and 1634, St. Mary’s Warwick, Warwickshire, UK. Reproduced by permission of St. Mary’s Church, Warwick, Warwickshire, UK.

The rank of earl is demarcated by the coronet his effigy wears. The countess’ effigy not only wears a coronet, but also wears the red velvet mantle lined with ermine that peers wore. The tomb clearly focuses upon the earl; the Latin funerary inscription that sits above the earl’s effigy speaks to his life and accomplishments:

Sacred to the God of the living. In certain hope of a resurrection in Christ, here lieth the most illustrious Robert Dudley, fifth son of John, Duke of Northumberland, Earl of Warwick, Viscount Lisle, etc. He was Earl of Leicester, Baron of Denbigh, Knight both of the Order of the Garter and of St. Michael, Master of the Horse to Queen Elizabeth (who distinguished him by particular favor), soon after Steward of the Queen’s household, Privy Councillor, Justice of the forests, Parks and Chases, this side of the Trent. From the year 1585 to the year 1587 Lieutenant and Captain General of the English Army sent by the said Queen Elizabeth to the Netherlands; Governor General and Commander of the provinces united in that place; Lieutenant Governor of England against Phillip II of Spain in the year 1588, when he was preparing to invade England with a numerous fleet and army. He gave his soul to God his savior on the 4th day of September in the year of salvation 1588. His most sorrowful wife Lettice, daughter of Frances Knolles, Knight of the Order of the Garter, and Treasurer to the Queen, through a sense of conjugal love and fidelity, hath put up this monument to the best and dearest of husbands.105

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105 Peter Aldous provided me with the English translation of the Latin funerary inscription, found on the additional plaque put up by Lettice Knolly’s grandson from her first marriage and for the digital images of the tomb. The Latin inscription reads as following:

DEO VIVENTIVMS
Leicester’s ancestry, rank, and court and government activities are listed one after the other. Other aspects of Dudley’s life have been edited out of the historical record.

Dudley’s first wife, Amy Robsart whose death was suspicious, is not listed, nor is his father’s execution. Omitting Dudley’s first wife establishes Lettice as the only wife Dudley ever married. This was an important claim, as Lady Douglass Sheffield also claimed that she had been formally engaged to the Dudley in 1571 and that they married in 1573, five years before he married Lettice in 1578. The only thing Dudley acknowledged was that Lady Sheffield bore him a son, but Dudley never referred to the

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Spe certa refurgendi in Christo, hic fitus est illustissimus ROBERTVS DVDLEYVS, JOAHHNIS DVCUS NORTHVMBRIAE, Comitis WARWICK, Vice comitus INSVLAE &t, filius quintus, Comes LECESTRIAE; Baron DENIBIGHIE; ordinis tum S. GEORGII rum S MICHAELIS, Eques auratus; Reginæ ELIZABETHAE (apud quem singulari gratia florebat) Hippocomus; Reginæ Aulæ fubinde Seneschallus; abintimis Consily: foretarum, parcorum, Chacearum &cita TRENTHAM summus Iusticarius: Excercitus Anglici a dicta Regina ELIZ: misi in BELGIO, ab Anno MDLXXXV ad Annum MDLXXXVII. Locum-renens et Capitaneus generalis: Provinciarum Confederatarum ibidem Gubernator generalis Et praese ctus; Regniq ANGLIA focum-fens contra PHILIPPUM II Hispanium, numerosa Claffe et Excercituir ANGLIAM MDLXXXVIII Invadentem.

Animam Deo servatori reddidit anno falutis MDDXXXVIII die Quarto Septembris Optimo et charissimo marito, moestissima uxor LETICIA FRANCISCI KNOLLES ordinis S Georgii equites aurati, et Regiae Thesaury filia, amoris et conjugalis fidei ergo posuit.

106 During the beginning of the reign, many thought that Elizabeth would chose Robert Dudley as her husband; one of the many impediments, however, was he was already married. Amy Robsart’s body was found at the bottom of the steps where she was living on 8 September 1560. Rumors abounded that Dudley had hired someone to murder her to advance his hopes of becoming king consort. In fact, Robsart’s sudden and mysterious death hurt Dudley’s chances of winning Elizabeth since there was too much suspicion surrounding the situation, and she could not afford to hurt her reputation, even though a court ruled her death accidental. Alan Haynes, The White Bear: Robert Dudley, The Elizabethan Earl of Leicester (London: Peter Owen, 1987), 28-34. Today, it is believed that Amy Robsart died due to complications from breast cancer, which had metastasized into her bones, which may have caused a spontaneous fracture of her spine, Haynes 33 and Ian Aird, “The Death of Amy Robsart: Accident, Suicide, or Murder—or Disease?” The English Historical Review 71 (1956), 69-79.

Leicester’s father, the Duke of Northumberland was executed for his failed attempt to place his son and daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Grey on the throne instead of Mary Tudor, see Williams 88.
boy as a legitimate heir. By editing out Amy Robsart, Lettice is also able to erase any contender to her position as the Earl of Leicester’s legitimate spouse. It is not only Lettice who gains from this revised telling of the Dudley family history: the Earl of Leicester is presented as a son of a high-ranking peer, a successful politician, a brave military leader, and “the best and dearest of husbands.” The Countess is only mentioned at the end as the one who commissioned the tomb “out of conjugal love and fidelity” for her husband.

The Countess of Leicester’s tomb monument only presents her as a loving wife and the daughter of a prominent male courtier, Sir Francis Knollys. It is very striking that she neither mentioned her mother, Catherine Carey, Lady Knollys, who was a favorite and a cousin of the queen and had served in the privy chamber, nor her own past service in Elizabeth’s privy chamber. In the coronation account book, the Countess’ mother is listed as one of four women who were appointed in the bedchamber, and one “Mris Knowles” was appointed as one of the “Maides of the Privy Chamber.” Lettice appears to have been close to Elizabeth, until the queen found out that her favorite, the Earl of Leicester had married her. At first, the earl of Leicester had wanted to keep their marriage a secret, in no small part, to avoid incurring the queen’s wrath, and once the queen did find out, Lettice gained the queen’s life long enmity. It is possible, that by erasing the history of her court service, Lettice hoped to erase the reasons for its demise.

One further omission was her marriage to her first husband, Walter Devereux, Earl of Essex, to whom she had been married from 1560 until the earl’s death in 1576. It

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108 Lady Katherine Carey-Knollys’ tomb and funeral was discussed earlier in this chapter.

109 TNA, LC 2/4/3 f. 53v.

110 Adams, “Dudley...Lettice,” XVII, 88, argues everybody knew about the marriage; the queen was just perturbed when she found out Leicester might be committing bigamy, because Lady Douglass Sheffield claimed that had been secretly married first.
is very plausible that the Countess of Leicester did not do more to integrate her family history and her individual court activities, because she had not originally intended to be buried with Robert Dudley. If Simon Adam is correct in his assertion that her second husband’s effigy “had to be shifted in order to fit hers on the tomb,” then it is possible that the tomb monument had originally intended to be just for her second husband. Therefore, the choice to not include her effigy on the tomb or more information about herself on the inscription was deliberate. As Llewellyn has argued, in early modern England, to ensure a godly death a good Christian was supposed to plan ahead and have all things settled, including the building of his or her tomb. The death of a spouse was often the catalyst for building a tomb monument both for the spouse and for themselves.\textsuperscript{111} Lettice Knollys had already outlived one husband and remarried, perhaps she thought that at forty-eight she could still remarry, and so wanted to leave herself options as to where she might be buried.

Indeed, in less than a year, the Countess of Leicester did remarry. Her third husband was Sir Christopher Blount who had been in Dudley’s service, prompting rumors that the countess and Blount had started out as adulterous lovers, and they had poisoned Dudley so they could marry.\textsuperscript{112} However, this was not the first time Lettice was mixed up in rumors of adultery and the poisoning of a husband! She had been rumored to have committed adultery against her first husband with Dudley while the Earl of Essex was in Ireland. Although Lettice and Dudley were not married until 1578, as early as December 1575, Antonio de Guras wrote to the Spanish government, after the earl of

\textsuperscript{111} Llewellyn, \textit{Funeral Monuments}, 53-59.
Essex had returned from his first expedition into Ireland that “as the thing is publicly talked about in the streets there is no objection to my writing openly about the great enmity which exists between the Earl of Leicester and the Earl of Essex, in consequence, it is said, of the fact whilst Essex was in Ireland his wife had two children by Leicester.”\(^{113}\) Shortly after Essex did return to Ireland in 1576 he died of dysentery which started to feed rumors that Leicester had Essex poisoned. In 1584 the libelous tract which has come to be known as *Leicester’s Commonwealth* which was written by disaffected exiled Catholic courtiers to vilify Dudley, claimed that “the like good chance had he in the death of my Lord of Essex…and that at a time most fortunate for his purpose; for when he was coming home from Ireland with intent to revenge himself upon my Lord of Leicester for begetting his wife with child in his absence.”\(^{114}\) In both *Leicester’s Commonwealth* and in the tract, *Leicester’s Ghost*, written at some point between 1595-1605 (although not widely printed until 1642) Lettice is presented as a passive object of Leicester’s desire and not an active participant in the adulterous affair:

The valliant Earle whome, absent, I did wronge  
In breaking Hymmaeus holy band,  
In Ireland did protract the tyme too long,  
Whilst some in England ingled vnderhand,  
And at his coming homeward to this land,’  
He died with poison, as they saie, infected,  
Not without cause—for vengeance, I suspected.

Because this fact notorious scandal bred,  
And for I did his gallant wife abuse,  
To salue the sore when this braue Lord was dead,  
I for my wife did his faire Ladie chuse.  
All flesh is fraile! Dere Ladie, me excuse:  
It was pure love that made me vndertake

\(^{114}\) *Leicester’s Commonwealth* 82.
This haplesse recontract with thee to make.\textsuperscript{115}

Even though the Countess of Leicester was not directly blamed for committing adultery with Leicester or implicated in the death of her husband, her reputation for honesty and chastity would still be compromised.

Despite all of the suspicion and gossip, the Earl and Countess of Leicester appeared to have been happily married. Nonetheless, the countess’ hasty third marriage to Sir Christopher Blount resurrected the ghosts of adultery and murder. \textit{Leicester’s Ghost} contains a veiled accusation of the countess’ complicity in the Earl of Leicester’s death:

\begin{quote}
I [Dudley] meant t’haue left my wife at Killingwoorth, 
Where She perhaps might during life haue stayd, 
Whilst vnder an ill Plannett I road foorth, 
Some secret to one man I open sayd, 
Which after to my ruine was bewrayde. 
As some by change of loues may be defiend, 
Soe Some by change of cupps haue been beguild 

\ldots

Soe I dranke Poyson, and forgot straightway 
That I was Earle of Lester anymore, 
But a small lumpe of Earth, and clod of claye\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

In these verses, Lettice’s name, and the words “bewrayde,” “change of loues,” and “poison” are all mentioned together.\textsuperscript{117} Although the accusations here are implicit, there is a later manuscript version of this tract that has a section entitled, “The Supplement of this Legend,” which is an account of the countess poisoning Leicester.\textsuperscript{118} All the veiled

\textsuperscript{115} Rogers, \textit{Leicester’s Ghost}, 30, lines 652-665.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Leicester’s Ghost}, 76, lines 1926-1932; 1940-1943.
\textsuperscript{117} Franklin B. Williams argues that these lines “hints awareness of the rumor that she managed the poisoning,” in “Notes,” in Franklin B. Williams, Jr. (ed.), \textit{Leicester’s Ghost} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press for the Newberry Library, 1972), 90, note 1926. As will be discussed there were much more explicit accounts of the countess murdering her husband.
\textsuperscript{118} This Oxford manuscript, Christ Church MS. $\Sigma X$ 15A5 was formerly the only manuscript piece in a folio volume of printed tracts from the Restoration. Unfortunately, the provenance is unknown, but it was at Christ Church by 1800, see Franklin B. Williams, “Introduction,” \textit{Leicester’s Ghost} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press for the Newberry Library, 1972), xix.
accusations made in *Leicester’s Ghost* are now explicitly stated. First, Lettice is branded an adulteress, “The Countess Leicester fell in love with Christopher Blount…and they had many secret meetings and much wanton familiarity.”¹¹⁹ The earl learned of the affair and plotted the deaths of the lovers, but

The Countess, also, having suspicion or some secret intelligence of this treachery against her, provided artificial means to prevent the Earl; which was by cordial, the which she had no fit opportunity to offer him till…surfeiting with excessive eating and drinking fell so ill…Then the deadly cordial was propounded unto him by the Countess.¹²⁰

In this supplementary account, all the vague discussion of drinking cups of poison and betrayal is fleshed out in detail, and the text clearly blames the countess and her adultery for the earl’s demise. However, it was not just scandalous verse that contradicted the countess’s claim of being Leicester’s faithful wife and sorrowing widow. The adulterous wife who murders her husband was a common trope in many murder pamphlets, a sub-genre of seventeenth-century print culture. As Peter Lake has argued, the typical plot of an adulterous wife who kills her husband played upon the fears of social disorder, where members of the subaltern classes tried to overthrow their social betters.¹²¹

Understanding the larger social and political implications of a wife murdering her husband adds another layer of complexity to one last charge made against Lettice in

¹²⁰ Craik 126-127.
¹²¹ Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 54-99 and Frances E. Dolan also argues, in *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1500-1800* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 21-22, that the crime of a wife murdering her husband was considered a crime against the social order. Dolan 30, 45 also posits that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, adultery, poison, and murder constituted an unholy trinity in many of murder cases where adulterous wives murdered their husbands with poison. Interestingly, the Countess’ crime of petty treason mirrors the earl’s attempt to disrupt the social order with his attempts to usurp the English throne. Both tracts, *Leicester’s Commonwealth* and *Leicester’s Ghost*, claim that Leicester poisoned multiple opponents he encountered throughout his court career and love-life. Since poisoning was associated with women and the negative side of femininity, claiming that Leicester murders his victims with poison in effect effeminates him.
Leicester’s Ghost: that she had not yet put up a fitting monument to her second husband. It is unclear when the countess commissioned the tomb that clearly existed before her own death in 1634, but as of 1602, Leicester’s servant of seventeen years, William Poyntz, noted its lack in a letter, stating that “my Lord…being lodged at Warwick without a tomb.”³¹² The ghost of Leicester laments that he “In Warwicke Towne, where my dead corps doth lye/ Poorly interd by frends too negligent.”³¹³ Further on in the tract Leicester declares, “Soe noe my graue a Marble stone is layd,/ Bare stone, weake Loue, soone hott and quickly cold.”³¹⁴ This passage clearly portrays the countess as a feckless widow, who as soon as (if not before) her husband was dead, no longer cared about him. Many women often built tombs for the deceased husbands as a way to safeguard their reputation as a virtuous wife.³¹⁵ Moreover, as M. Bryan Curd has demonstrated, tomb monuments were supposed to memorialize not just individuals or families, but the social hierarchy in terms of representing and glorifying the patriarchal family.³¹⁶ By committing adultery, murdering her husband, and refusing to memorialize her husband properly by not commissioning a tomb monument, Lettice is refusing to accept her proper position in the social hierarchy. The countess may have been aware of these attacks against her character, and this may have been the reason why Lettice originally commissioned the tomb to only commemorate the Earl of Leicester and all of his glorious accomplishments while only presenting her self “as His most sorrowful wife Lettice,” who “through a sense of conjugal love and fidelity, hath put up this monument to the best and dearest of

³¹² Williams xix; 90, footnote 1999. Hatfield MS 12, 403.
³¹⁵ Llewellyn, Funeral Monuments, 293.
³¹⁶ Curd 273. However, as Curd also argues in is essay, women could often modify the patriarchal overtones of the tomb monuments and portray the couple more as equal partners depending upon the text of the epitaph and the placement of the monumental effigies.
husbands.” By leaving off her effigy, the tomb revolves around the earl and does not compromise her claim that she did not commission this monument to celebrate herself, only the life and accomplishments of her second husband. Perhaps she changed her mind in 1634, because her reputation was no longer in question.127

Although the countess’ tomb attests to her ability to have eventually reconciled her hasty marriage after Leicester’s death, her third marriage was not well received by her children or the rest of the court. Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, Lettice’s son by her first husband, described his mother’s third marriage as an “unhappy choyse,” because the marriage was unconventional: the countess had married a servant sixteen years her junior.128 Unfortunately for Lettice Knollys, her son’s sentiments would prove to be a sad understatement. In 1601, her husband participated in the failed revolt led by the same son, Robert, and both were executed.129 Blount’s execution for treason may have deprived Lettice of the choice to be buried with her third husband, but it did not create the necessity to automatically banish him from the family record. As the Countess demonstrated with the telling of the Earl of Leicester’s own family history, it was quite easy to edit out any dishonorable deaths or other moments of family disgrace, even treason. Therefore, her grandson, Gervase Clifton, made a deliberate decision to leave Blount’s name off the plaque he wrote for his grandmother which is not located on the tomb monument itself, but placed on the wall nearby. (Figure 4.13)

127 The children she had had with Essex did become favorites of King James and Queen Anna of Denmark, and the family’s fortunes which had suffered under Elizabeth were rehabilitated under the new dynasty. See Adams, “Dudley . . . Lettice,” XXII, 89.
The additional plaque reconstructs the countess’ life so that she is presented as a courtier, a godly woman, wife, mother, and a woman who was willing to stand up to Queen Elizabeth:

Vpon the death of the excellent and piovs Lady Lettice Covntess of Leicester who dyed vpon Christmas Day in the morning 1634

Look on this vault and search it well
Mvch treasure in it lately fell
Wee are all robd and all doe say
Ovr wealth was carrieyd this away
And that the theft might here be fovnd
Tis brieved closely vnder grovnd
Yet if yov gently stirr the movld
There all ovr losse yov may behovld
There may you see that face that hand
Which once was fairest in the land
She that in her younger yeares
Matcht with two great English peares
She that did supply the warrs
With thunder and the covrt with stars
She that in her youth had bene
Darling to the maiden Queene
Till she was content to quitt
Her favovre for her favoritt
Whose gyold threed when she saw spvnn
And the death of her brave soonn

Thought it safest to retyre
From all care and vaine desire
To a private countrie cell
Where she spent her dayes soe well
That to her the better sort
Came as to an holy covrt
And the poore that lived neare
Death nor famine could not feare
Whilst she lived she lived thvs
Till that God displeased with vs
Suffered her at last to fall
Not from him but from vs all
And because she tooke delight
Christs poore members to invite
He fully now requites her love
And sends his angels from above
That did to heaven her sovle convoy
To solemnize his owne birth day

The first eight lines set up the tomb vault as a treasure box holding an important piece of the family wealth—Lettice. Then her beauty and its ability to attract husbands of high rank is lauded, “There may you see that face that hand/Which once was fairest in the land/ She that in her younger yeares/ Matched with two great English peares.” This praise of her physical beauty, I believe, is more than conventional praise. As discussed in chapter three, Lettice was often accused of trying to compete with the queen as the most regal woman in the realm. This claim to be the most beautiful woman “in the land”
recognizes Lettice as more beautiful than the queen. The inscription continues framing Lettice’s beauty and ability to marry twice as an exercise of power at court with, “She that did supply the warrs/ With thvnder and the covrt with stars/ She that in her yovth had bene/ Darling to the maiden Queen/ Till she was content to quitt/ Her favovre for her favoritt.” This particular section of the epitaph presents Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester as a woman who challenged the queen’s authority and chips away at the Cult of the Virgin Queen. These lines declare that it was the countess who through her beauty and her roles as wife and mother and not just the queen who supplied the court with majesty and direction. Moreover, the lines “she that did supply the warrs/ With thvnder and the covrt with stars,” may be referring to Lettice’s children. Although she had been banned from court her children from her first marriage especially her daughter Penelope who was known for her beauty and her son Robert who fought in many of Elizabeth’s (rather unsuccessful) wars were (in)famous figures at Elizabeth’s court. Therefore, Lettice’s beauty, marriages, and children are set in contrast to Elizabeth’s virginity and barrenness.

The countess’ grandson was not the only member of her family to equate beauty with majestic power. As discussed in chapter two, in 1600, her daughter, Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich petitioned Elizabeth on behalf of her brother, the second Earl of Essex who had grossly offended the queen, to forgive him. Lady Rich made a direct parallel between Elizabeth’s beauty and her princely majesty: “But let your Majesties devine power,” she wrote, “be no more eclipsed then your Beautie, wch hathe shyned
through the worlde.”¹ Elizabeth very deliberately fashioned her public persona as an ageless beauty. After 1575 Elizabeth’s portraits were not a realistic depiction of her facial features, but presented her, as Roy Strong has termed it, in an eternal “masque of beauty.” Elizabeth I would have undermined her monarchical authority had she been painted as an old, childless woman.² Instead, Elizabeth was portrayed as an ageless goddess whose beauty and virtue were able to win her male courtiers’ love and devotion. The Cult of the goddess Elizabeth framed the queen’s interactions with her male courtiers in terms of courtly love. By stating that the Countess of Leicester was more beautiful than Elizabeth, the countess is also being presented as a rival to the queen for her male courtiers’ attention and adulation.

The inscription goes on to state that the countess’ greatness even endeared the queen to her—until she married Leicester. The line, “Till she was content to quit,” the queen’s favor in exchange to marry the queen’s favorite endowes Lettice with agency—she chose when to exchange the queen’s favor for marriage. The countess is elevated, but at Elizabeth’s expense. Elizabeth spitefully withdraws her favor from Lettice when the countess is able to win Leicester away from the queen. Here the queen is not the untouchable virginal icon; Elizabeth is portrayed as a spiteful virgin and a sore loser. The queen’s choice to remain a virgin is also questioned: was Elizabeth married to England or was she not able to compete with the women in her court? Whereas Blanche Parry was able to celebrate her choice to remain unmarried by glorifying Elizabeth’s virginity, the

² Roy Strong has written extensively on how Elizabeth shaped her public image in her later years as the eternally youthful Virgin Queen, a small selection of his work, The Masque of Beauty (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1972), The Cult of Elizabeth, Gloriana, and “Gloriana,” FMR 65 (1993),19-40.
Countess of Leicester’s epitaph presents her ability to marry and produce children as superior to Elizabeth’s unmarried state. Moreover, Elizabeth’s royal favor is also devalued in the epitaph; Lettice chose to “qvitt” it when something better came along, a husband and a “great English peare.”

Sadly, the countess’ triumph over Queen Elizabeth was fleeting, as the funerary inscription makes clear when it continues with the death of Leicester and “her brave sonn,” another allusion to Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex and his execution for his revolt against the queen. Once more, if the conjunction of family history and national history produces any disgrace for the family, it is edited out. According to the plaque, after the death of these two men, Lettice retired “to a private countrie cell” where she lived out the rest of her life taking care of the poor and earning God’s favor until at last God “did to heaven her sovle convoy/ To solemnize his own birthday.” These lines set up a conventional court/country dichotomy.\(^3\) By Elizabeth’s reign, the country was identified with the common good as opposed to private greed. As already discussed with the monopoly controversy of the 1590s, the court was identified as a place of corruption where private gain trumped the public good.\(^4\) Moreover, by the early seventeenth-century the concept of “country” was equated with “the symbol of simplicity and wholesome pleasures based on religion and respect for tradition.”\(^5\) The tomb’s epitaph not only rejects the Virgin Queen icon, but desacralizes the place where that worship takes place,

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\(^3\) As Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603-1660* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9-15, 19, 21, understanding the court/country divide—or even if there was one in the mind of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century minds is an issue of historographical debate. However, I believe that the Countess of Leicester’s funerary plaque is playing with the idea that the country was a place of morality and a haven from the immoral court. This court/country dichotomy will be discussed further in the chapter.


\(^5\) Zagorin 34.
the court. Lettic’s banishment from court is re-configured as an escape from a corrupt and blasphemous environment.

The country was not always portrayed as an environment that was disconnected and completely separate from the court. As with the example of Blanche Parry’s tomb at Bacton, Herefordshire, the cult of Elizabeth spread to the countryside away from the court. Parry was not alone in representing herself as a practitioner of the cult of the Virgin Queen. Sir Henry Lee, who served Elizabeth as her champion and originator of the Accession Day tilts which celebrated the day “the Protestant Elizabeth succeeded her Catholic sister Mary.”

Lee held his post as the queen’s champion until he retired in 1590. Lee’s retirement was part of the scripted festivities for the 1590 Accession Day Tilt, which included a song which described Lee’s leaving the court for the country where he would continue to worship his queen from afar. The second and third verses describe Lee’s transition from a knight who defended his queen with his lance to a monk who would now serve Elizabeth with prayers for her:

My helmet now shall make an hiue for bees,  
And louers songs shall turne to holy psalms;  
A man-at-armes must now sit on his knees,  
And feed on pray’rs, that are old ages almes:  
And so [though ?] from court to cottage I depart,  
My saint is sure of mine vnspotted hart.

And when I sadly sit in homely cell,  
I’le teach my swains this carrol for a song,—  
Blest be the hearts that thinke my soueraigne well,  
Curs’d be the soules that thinke to doe her wrong!  
Goddesse, vouchsafe this aged man his right,  
To be your beadsman now that was your knight.

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7 Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, 70.
According to the song, Lee claims that “from court to cottage I depart.” However, his bond to his sainted sovereign is not cut. Although he will be deprived of her immediate presence which causes him to “sadly sit in homely cell,” he will take comfort in being Elizabeth’s “beadsman now that was your knight.” He will pray for his goddess in his country cell. In these verses the court and country are connected, and in both environments the courtier can serve his goddess. There is no corrupt court, nor is the country a sanctuary—it is a place where a courtier can still serve the goddess of whose presence he is now sadly deprived. Lee also had his place at court and his role as champion commemorated on his now lost tomb monument at Quarrendon, Buckinghamshire:

Also in Court wher he shone in all those fayre partes became his profession & Vowes, honouringe his highlye gracious Mris with Reysinge those later Olimpiads of her Coronation Justs and Tournaments (Therby Tryinge & Treininge the Courtier in those Exercises of Armes that kepe the person bright & steeled to Hardinesse, That by Softe Rusts and Weares) wherein still himselfe lead and Triumphed, caryinge awaye the spoyles of Grace from his Soveraigne & Renowne from the Worlde for the fairest Man at Armes & most complete Courtier of his Times.

Lee, much like Parry, locates his importance both at the court of Elizabeth and as a producer of Elizabethan court culture. While Parry commemorated her position as chief gentlewoman of the privy chamber, Lee recorded his role as courtier-knight who trained fellow men in his profession.

However, the Countess of Leicester is commemorated for very different reasons from Lee and Parry. The plaque’s emphasis on Lettice’s power and piety works in

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9 The very different portrays of the court and country by Lee and by the Countess of Leicester’s grandson is slightly ironic when the fact that Henry Lee and Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester were related. Lee’s grandfather had married as his second wife, Lettice Penistion, widow of Sir Robert Knowles. Lettice’s son by her first marriage, Francis Knowles (or Knollys—there is no one way to spell names or words in Elizabethan English) was the father of Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester. See Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, 130.

conjunction with the tomb monument to portray the countess as a good wife and a good woman and rehabilitates a reputation damaged by the rumors that surrounded her and her last two marriages. The countess’ choice to marry Dudley and forgo Elizabeth’s royal favor is also refashioned as an episode of Lettice’s superiority over the queen, as opposed to a foolish and unfortunate decision. And this may be the reason why Lettice’s service to the queen is not specifically mentioned: her importance to the family history did not lie in her royal service to the queen, but in her ability to challenge the queen’s beauty and majesty.

Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester and Catherine Grey, who believed she was the Countess of Hertford, had tomb monuments which challenged the public persona that Elizabeth fashioned for herself as the eternally beautiful, youthful Virgin Queen. These tomb monuments were only one of the media used to demonstrate “dissent, criticism, and disrespect” of Elizabeth’s life, reign, and post-humous memory. As Julia M. Walker and other scholars have demonstrated, wherever there are icons, there are iconoclasts. The Cult of Elizabeth had a dark side where Elizabeth was criticized and mocked in pamphlets, sermons, poetry, and images. Walker identified tombs as an important site where dissent and disrespect could be registered when she discussed James I’s designs for Elizabeth I’s tomb as compared to the grander tomb he gave his mother, Mary Queen of Scots. However, like so many discourses about issues over Elizabeth’s representation, women other than queens are left out of the discussion. There were other

13 See Walker, “Reading the Tombs of Elizabeth I,” 510-530; “Bones of Contention,” 252-276; and The Elizabeth Icon, 6-48.
women and other families, not just James VI of Scotland and his Stuart relatives, that could only promote themselves and their families by challenging the glorious Cult of the Virgin Queen.

The tomb and funerary plaque of Lettice Knollys, the Countess of Leicester, the tomb monuments of Blanche Parry, Helena, Marchioness of Northampton, and Catherine Grey are all sites where women’s lives and deaths were deliberately shaped to not only construct a very specific family history, but a family history connected to larger historical narratives. This connection between family history and the larger national history has important implications for writing about the reign of Elizabeth I. These monuments attest to the fact that women were active agents at the Elizabethan court and that they participated in the process of fashioning the queen’s public image outside the center of the court. Some of these women’s tombs spread the Cult of the Virgin Queen, but others defaced the Elizabeth icon. The decision to include women’s court service was a crucial component in building a specific family history and in building a particular history of the reign of Elizabeth, because the image of the queen and the image of female courtiers were intertwined.

More than just a memory of Queen Elizabeth and her court was commemorated by the women and their families; funerary monuments were regarded as historical records. Therefore, when women’s court careers were commemorated on their funerary monuments, their positions and royal service was being interjected into the larger national historical narrative. However, women’s court careers were only included when it was advantageous for the family’s reputation to be directly connected to the queen and her court. For other families, their power lay in their ability to stand independent of the
monarch, and so, women’s court careers had to be excised or severely edited to allow the family to stand as equals, and not as servants, to the Crown. Some women like Blanche Parry glorified the queen, because doing so highlighted her own power and prestige, and some families like the Gorges had to edit their relationship to the queen in order to share more fully in the glory of Elizabeth’s memory. Other women, like Catherine Grey and Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester promoted themselves and their families at the expense of the queen. Women’s bodies, whether their bodies of flesh or their monumental bodies of marble or wood, could extend the queen’s power or challenge it. Women, bodies, families and politics were uniquely intertwined at the court of Elizabeth I, a fact writ large and carved in stone
Conclusion: Bodies At Rest

“Let’s talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,” Shakespeare’s King Richard commanded his companions as he watched his kingdom slipping away from him. Richard despaired that although he was a king, he was powerless to keep the treacherous Bolingbroke was going to take everything from him. The king continues his lamentation,

Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth;
Let’s choose executors and talk of wills:
And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke’s,
And nothing can we call our own but death,
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as a paste and cover to our bones.
For God’s sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings

Richard concludes that his only possessions left consist of his grave and his death. He also identifies the ground as a grave and as a site where royal histories are remembered and rehearsed. It is on the ground that Richard and his audience will share final stories of Richard’s predecessors. What Richard fails to realize is that monarchs do not have control over their graves and the stories of their deaths. Instead, the memory of monarchs, the memorials to them, and even their “deposed bodies” belonged to those who outlived them. Bodies that were interred in earth could be dug up, and funerary monuments smashed and rebuilt, all of which culminated in a different telling of the story of the death, the life, and the reign of that monarch. In the end, kings do not own their

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1 Richard II (III. ii. 145ff).
2 Richard II (III. ii. 146-156 ff).
corpse or their graves, and consequently relinquish control over the histories of their reign.

Queen regnants suffered the same fate. The joint tomb of Elizabeth I and her elder half sister, Mary I, and the tomb of their cousin Mary Stuart, Queen of Scott, are some of the most popular landmarks in Westminster Abbey for tourists. The histories of these well-known tomb monuments, however, have been obscured. Their famous tombs may be their final resting place, but they were not their first. Their removal and re-interment within their new funerary monuments were deliberate actions executed by Elizabeth’s successor, Mary Stuart’s son, King James VI of Scotland and I of England. As Julia M. Walker has discussed extensively, Elizabeth I’s present tomb at Westminster Abbey is not her original resting place. In 1603 Elizabeth was interred with her grandfather Henry VII under the altar in the abbey chapel bearing her grandfather’s name. When James I came to the English throne, he needed to smooth over some rather messy family and national history: the execution of his mother, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth dying childless, and himself, a Scot, ascending the English throne. One of the ways he tackled this problem was to reconstruct the dynastic history of the English crown through a building program of royal tombs at Westminster Abbey. James built a grand tomb for Elizabeth, but the tomb was over the site where Elizabeth’s half sister lay interred, Queen Mary I. The two sisters were buried together, but the large monument on this spot only depicts Elizabeth’s effigy.

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As Walker argues, by deliberately moving Elizabeth in 1607, from the center of the chapel, to the north aisle, literally to the side, James physically marginalized Elizabeth from the Tudor-Stuart succession story. James put two, barren women together and off to the side, making it clear that childless women have no important place in a family history. Pride of place was reserved for the reproductive female relatives who had produced the path that led James I to the English throne, and the woman to whom he did give a prominently placed tomb was his mother, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. James built a monument to his mother that cost almost three times as much (£2000 vs. £765) as the one he built for Elizabeth, and it is both taller and wider. James carefully chose the site of his mother’s tomb; she is buried directly behind King Henry VII’s mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort and in front of the monument of Margaret, Countess of Lennox, James’ paternal grandmother (his father is one of the mourners depicted on the countess’ tomb). James’ careful placement of his mother’s tomb situates her in a fruitful dynastic line that both rehabilitates Mary Stuart’s position in the dynastic history and bolsters his own claim to the crown.4

James then claimed Elizabeth’s original resting place as his own. By placing himself in the same grave as his great-great-grandfather, King Henry VII, James makes clear that his ascendance to the throne represents a continuum and not a rupture in the history of the English crown. The positioning of his grave, his cousins, Elizabeth and Mary, and his mother’s grave declare that he is the direct descendant of King Henry VII. James’ displacement of Elizabeth I from her original tomb also displaces her from the dynastic history: James I is King of England not because a childless woman bequeathed

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the throne to him, but because he is the great-great-grandson of King Henry VII. ⁵
Despite the fact James’ royal tomb program celebrated patriarchy, the deliberate use of
women’s monumental bodies subtly reminds us that James I received his kingly blood
from his mother.

Ironically, James’ I plan to marginalize Elizabeth backfired. Her tomb is just as
popular a tourist site as Mary Stuart’s. Elizabeth’s tomb monument is symbolic in many
ways of how the history of her reign has been viewed: Elizabeth is presented as
exceptional, often at the expense of other women. After all, Elizabeth shares her tomb
with her half-sister Mary I, but Mary is not visually represented—Elizabeth’s
monumental body effaces Mary from the visual record. Elizabeth’s historical significance
has also been, in a large part, predicated upon a false claim of singularity. Elizabeth was
not the only woman at her court. Moreover, as the tomb monuments of Elizabeth’s
female courtiers demonstrated, the history of Elizabeth’s reign and her larger role in
English history, often changes when women are added to the narratives. For too long
Elizabeth’s relationships with other women have been obscured, ignored or dismissed.
One of the most striking conclusions of this dissertation is that including women into the
histories of Elizabeth’s reign does not take away her accomplishment of being a
successful queen regnant in a culture that equated female rule with a disordered society,
or in the words of Natalie Zemon Davis, “the world turned upside down.” ⁶ Instead, by
examining the way in which court women interacted with Elizabeth expands our
understanding of how Elizabeth was able to construct and successfully wield her political
authority.

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⁵ Walker, The Elizabeth Icon, 29
⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays (Stanford:
The dissertation’s unifying theme has been “bodies.” As stated in the introduction, Elizabethan court women have been largely effaced from the Elizabethan political historiography, because their anatomical sex precluded them from participating in the traditional political institutions: judicial, military, and administrative offices. And yet women had always been a part of court life, including its politics, but their participation was usually through informal channels of political patronage, marriages that cemented political alliances, bearing children to continue a family’s legacy, and looking after the financial resources of the family and its household. Early modern politics, wealth, and power were all intertwined and women’s participation was necessary in keeping those links connected. However, when the body of the monarch was a queen regnant, this affected how other female bodies at court had a chance to participate in politics.

As demonstrated with the privy chamber of Henry VIII, men from the nobility and the gentry competed for the chance to staff the privy chamber, because they were being given a position which required their constant attendance upon the monarch, the source of all political power. However, their political privileges were not confined to controlling access to and influence over the monarch and vying for his favor, but their intimate handling of the king’s sacrosanct royal body imbued these men with the ability to act as extensions of the king. When women entered the privy chamber to act as the body servants and companions to the queen regnant, although their gender precluded them from combining their position in the privy chamber with other government offices, they still held the privilege of acting as queenly surrogates which helped the queen to extend her monarchical presence and authority to places where she could not go. With the
ability to appropriate and deploy her privy chamber women’s bodies as queenly surrogates, allowed Elizabeth to not miss an opportunity to build ties of loyalties with her subjects, because she could graciously bestow upon her subjects the honor of her royal presence through these women.

One of the larger ramifications of this study is the realization that the gender of the monarch did not necessarily take away the semi-mystical aspects of the royal body. A queen regnant’s body was still the physical embodiment and the ultimate symbol of monarchy. However, the monarch’s gender did shape the way in which he or she could use her politicized, natural body. A king’s sexuality was not placed under the same restrictions as that of a queen regnant’s. The corporeal majesty of a queen regnant resided in part in her sexual virtue, and once again the privy chamber women (usually) played an important role in helping Elizabeth maintain both her virtue and her crown. Queen regnants were not just subject to patriarchal norms espoused and enforced by men, but by women too. Although Elizabeth was in theory an absolute monarch, her ability to freely use her sexuality was partially hindered by her female attendants. However, women’s moral authority to police other women’s bodies also meant that Elizabeth attempted to control her female courtiers’ bodies too. Court women and their royal mistress used their words, their dress and their bodies to exert control over each other, but for very different reasons. Elizabeth needed to make sure her female attendants behaved chastely to demonstrate that the queen kept an orderly household and controlled the bodies of her subjects just as any male monarch would, and because these women were extensions of the queen. Unchaste maids of honor both reflected and represented an unchaste queen. Elizabeth also needed to regulate her female courtiers’ bodies, clothes, and sexuality so
that they could not use them to either undermine her authority or worse to usurp it. Not all women used their bodies or their clothes to challenge Elizabeth’s authority. Some women did try to regulate Elizabeth’s body, not gain for themselves, but so that the queen’s body natural was not stripped of the body politic. Moreover, the privy chamber’s constant attendance upon the queen, sleeping with her, dressing and undressing her gave these women important knowledge about the queen’s body, whether it exhibited any signs of sexual incontinence or testified to her self-proclaimed virginity and by extension her fitness to rule.

However, Elizabeth’s privy chamber women and female courtiers used clothes in another way to help construct Elizabeth’s politicized public image. Elizabeth I is one of England’s most famous monarchs, and in no small part, because of the beautiful, colorful, and iconic images created and preserved in her portraiture. But for too long scholars have ignored the women who helped in the creation, perpetuation, and spread of Elizabeth’s image, which helped to support her monarchal authority in various ways. Sometimes it was a woman who painted or engraved the image of the queen, at other times the figures of court women were included in the image of the queen, sometimes women commissioned images of the queen, and lastly, sometimes court women provided Elizabeth with the very clothes and jewels used to fashion and reinforce her queenly identity. Moreover, by uncovering the role women played in constructing the queen’s image, we also get a more nuanced understanding of how material objects were utilized to construct a monarch’s majesty. Monarchs did not dress passive courtiers or use their clothes and bejeweled bodies to stand as silent witnesses to their monarch’s wealth and power. Instead, courtiers often played a part in the construction of the monarch’s public
image and sartorial majesty. Clothing was also an important political tool because it was used by both monarch and subject alike to create bonds of loyalty and to build up credit in the other’s eyes that could later be used later to obtain a favor. Lastly, although courtiers often contributed to fashioning the monarch’s image, they could use the gifts they offered the monarch as a subtle, but effective way to critique the monarch.

However, the system of courtly gift exchange was also another example of the way the queen could employ her female courtiers to help her build ties with the rest of her subjects. Elizabeth could depend upon her female courtiers to act as bridges connecting the queen to her subjects, often using them to send written and oral messages, exchanging gifts and other testaments of her pleasure, or voicing her displeasure with her subjects. The privy chamber women connected Elizabeth to her subjects in two distinct ways. First, as we saw with the privy chamber women’s ability to act as the queen’s deputies at christenings, their bodies which could represent the queen’s royal body, enabling the queen to not forgo an opportunity to create or reinforce a link between herself and that child’s family. At other times, they acted as “middlewomen,” by presenting the queen with requests from her subjects, and relaying the queen’s reply. Moreover, these women could also act as middlewomen, helping a client who was away from court press a suit for royal patronage by building and maintaining a connection between the queen and the subject. The privy chamber women could do this by building up the credit of the individual, directing their suit to other powerful members of Elizabeth’s court, both men and women, and advising clients when to drop or press suits, and how to use gifts to build up their credit with the queen and show their gratitude towards her.
It is also by studying the ways women participated in court patronage, historians gain a better understanding of how the system worked. Women were active patrons, and it was not necessarily due to their gender that their clients’ suits moved so slowly or not at all. We still do not have a complete understanding of how Elizabeth’s privy chamber women participated in royal patronage system, because the bulk of our evidence is from the last decade of Elizabeth’s reign when new patterns of patronage were emerging. The queen, already notorious for her parsimony, became even less inclined to grant her hardworking courtiers titles of nobility and government positions. Therefore, if the bulk of our evidence speaks to the privy chamber women’s facing difficulty in pressing their clients’ suits it could reflect Elizabeth’s problem with dispensing royal bounty, not the privy chamber women’s substandard performance as patrons. Additionally, their tendency to work with other people to help press their clients’ suit also does not automatically render them politically inept or politically neutralized. It was customary that a client sought multiple patrons, and by contacting a privy chamber woman, clients were often put in contact with some of the most powerful men in the realm.

Lastly, the evidence shows that the privy chamber women were not affected by the factions that arose at the end of Elizabeth’s reign does not automatically mean that these women were politically insignificant. Historians’ claims that many of the leading male government officials did not cultivate the privy chamber women as friends, thus signifying that these women were apolitical ignore the fact that most male government officials had female relatives in the privy chamber: Robert Dudley, William and Robert Cecil, William Brooke, and Charles Howard to name just a few. An interesting exception is the Earl of Essex. His mother and sisters were not welcome at court, but Essex had
other female privy chamber court contacts, his step-father’s sister-in-law, the Countess of Warwick, his mother’s two sisters Ann and Elizabeth. More research needs to be done to try and determine in what ways they might have tried to help him or if they did nothing, why.

Therefore, women were indeed busy bodies at court. Their daily duties of taking care of Elizabeth’s bodily needs and keeping her company allowed these women to actively participate in Elizabethan politics. They helped construct Elizabeth’s majesty, amplify and extend her presence, but sometimes they refused to let Elizabeth appropriate their bodies hindering the queen’s attempt to build connections with her subjects. Some protected Elizabeth’s virginal body, while others attacked it. Even in death, women’s lives, political activities, and their carved monumental bodies helped construct Elizabeth’s cult of the Virgin queen while others used their funerary monuments to expose the cult as idolatry and blasphemy. Moreover, women’s bodies threatened Elizabeth’s monarchical authority in ways men’s bodies never could. Although men wrote treatises attacking and defending gynæcocracy, all the rivals to Elizabeth’s crown were other women.

Just as Elizabeth’s gender did not preclude her from the office of monarch, but shaped the way she would conduct herself in it, the privy chamber women’s gender did not render them as apolitical entities at court, but also shaped the ways in which they would be able to participate in politics. However, this dissertation has only examined some of the ways in which women participated in court politics. One of the main objectives of this dissertation was to demonstrate that women’s political importance did not rise and fall solely upon their involvement or their exclusion from royal patronage
and policy making. Instead, by taking analytical tools from a number of fields, dress history, art history, literature, in conjunction with more traditional historical sources such as government documents, diaries, and letters, I have been able to flesh out some of the alternate political roles Elizabethan court women played. Queenship, it now appears, was not only shaped by the activities and clothes of the body of the queen, but by the garments and bodies of her court women. The politics of the court and of the cult of the Virgin Queen was constructed and contested not only by the queen and her male councilors, but by her female courtiers too, especially the women of the Elizabethan privy chamber.
Appendix: The (Select) Tudor-Stuart Family Tree

Henry VII m. Elizabeth of York

Henry VIII m. Anne Boleyn (2nd wife)
  Elizabeth I

Margaret Tudor m. James IV of Scotland (1st husband)
  James V m. Mary of Guise (2nd wife)

Mary Tudor m. Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk (2nd husband)
  Frances Brandon m. Henry Grey, Marquis of Dorset (1st husband)
  Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots m. Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, (2nd husband and a grandson of Margaret Tudor by a subsequent husband)
  James VI and I
  Jane Grey m. Guilford Dudley
  Catherine Grey m.? Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford
  Mary Grey m. Thomas Keyes
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8159 1588 New Year’s gift roll
9772 1567 New Year’s gift roll
70038/104 Blanche Parry’s will published as a pamphlet in 1845 by one of her descendents

Egerton 3052 1584 New Year’s gift roll

Harleian Roll V 18 1562 New Year’s gift roll

Lansdowne Roll 17 1589 New Year’s gift roll
109 miscellaneous letters and papers

Royal Appendix 68 1587 inventory of Elizabeth’s jewels in Blanche Parry’s custody that were turned over to Mary Radcliffe

RP 294/I 1600 New Year’s gift roll
RP 294/II 1557 New Year’s gift roll

Folger-Shakespeare Library, Washington DC

X.d. 428 Cavendish-Talbot letters
19 manuscript of John Hales’ pamphlet, “A Declaratyon of the Successyon of the Crown Imperyall of England”

W.b 262-266 Annals of the Seymours

Z.d 12 1564 New Year’s gift roll
13 1565 New Year’s gift roll (incomplete)
14 1575 New Year’s gift roll
15 1579 New Year’s gift roll
16 1585 New Year’s gift roll
17 1599 New Year’s gift roll

Hatfield House, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK

Cecil Papers 24/11 letter from James Parry to his cousin, Mes. Jane Shelley
164/30-40 Instructions to the Countess of Arundel from Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots
Society of Antiquaries, London, UK

538  1568 New Year’s gift roll
537  1578 New Year’s gift roll

The National Archive, Kew, UK

C  47/3/38  1563 New Year’s gift roll
    47/3/39  1577 New Year’s gift roll
    47/3/40  1598 New Year’s gift roll
    47/3/41  1603 New Year’s gift roll
    115/91  1561-1585 daybook of the Wardrobe of the Robes

E  101/429/3  Exchequer: Accounts various, another list of coronation account expenses
    351/541-543  Exchequer: Pipe Office: Declared Accounts

LC  2/4/3  Lord Chamberlain’s department
     2/4/4  Elizabeth I’s coronation expenses account book
     5/31-37  Wardrobe of the Robe Accounts
     5/49  book of warrants for liveries

Prob  11  Wills

SP  12  State Papers, domestic, Elizabeth I

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